

# PIDGIN ISLAND

HAROLD MACGRATH



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LOS ANGELES





ARTHUR WILLIAM BROWN—

Could he possibly become a comrade

# PIDGIN ISLAND

*By*

HAROLD MacGRATH

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THE MAN ON THE BOX, THE GOOSE GIRL,  
HALF A ROGUE, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

ARTHUR WILLIAM BROWN

INDIANAPOLIS

THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY  
PUBLISHERS

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BOOKBINDERS AND PRINTERS  
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

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To

FRANK B. SILVERWOOD, OF LOS ANGELES

A good fisherman and a good comrade





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## **PIDGIN ISLAND**



# PIDGIN ISLAND

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## CHAPTER I

### "THE COMPLEAT ANGLER"

**T**HE scarlet apple hung on the bough and the purple grape in the vine; and over the calm clear water came the incomparable perfumes of loam and field. The girl in the fishing boat closed her eyes in drowsy ecstasy; her lips stirred and she breathed deeply and strongly in vain to catch the essence of those namable yet intangible perfumes. Her eyes opened again. How she loved it all! The low-lying islands with their half-moons of sandy shores; the fair blue above and the darker blue in the mirror below, the mirror of Narcissus; the great snowy clouds rising one upon the other and forming

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castles and cathedrals and battlements, slowly drifting apart, gathering again, and yet so firm they seemed to the eye that one might easily climb to heaven up their sides! The sweep of the mighty lake to the southwest, fury and terror asleep; and the mid-afternoon sun that dazzled and blinded and made one instinctively seek the restful green of pine-clad Grenadier; and through the transparent shallows upon which the boat rode ever so quietly the girl saw pale jade and emeralds. She loved this far-reaching panorama; the bigness of it soothed and stilled the torment in her soul.

Suddenly she came out of her dream, alive, eager, star-eyed. She held the rod firmly, paid out a foot or two of line, paused, stretched forth her arm, and—struck! At the same time there was a swirl of water about the oar-blades; and the grizzled old guide smiled as he saw the rod describe a half-circle and heard the line speak like a softly touched harp-

## “THE COMPLEAT ANGLER”

string. A moment later there was a silvery flash, thirty feet away; and then the battle began.

The girl set her teeth upon her nether lip, supremely excited. Oh, the brave fish! Sure that her strike had gone home, she relaxed her thumb, and the reel purred under the wild dash for the deep ledge that fell away abruptly from the shoal. Twenty feet she let him go, then her thumb came down relentlessly. With the butt of the rod snug under her left arm, her left hand clasping the reel, she began slowly to bring him in. Up, up he came, broke, spangling the air with topaz drops; down into the deeps again, to the right, to the left, toward the boat. Could she beat him? A bit of slack now and she would lose him. But well she knew the game. She swept the rod into her right hand, holding it high. Just in time. He was straight below now. Easily she lowered the rod; the tip almost touched the water. Mighty tugs, strong and savage.

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She had him. She began to strip the line, expertly; and presently she saw him, a tiger of the lakes; a streak of golden-brown against a background of jade and emerald and malachite.

“The net!”—imperiously.

She played him till he came to the top, on his side; and deftly she reached under him with the mesh. Golden-brown for a moment longer, and then, black as coal he lay at her feet, gasping, beaten. She stared down at him; so small a thing, yet so wild and strong, his fins stretched their widest, his tail like a beautiful fan. Soberly she passed the net over to the guide, who reached down inside and thrust a blunt finger into the gills.

“Whut d’y’ know ’bout that?” he cried as he exhibited the hook which had fallen out. “’F he’d on’y known it; one more yank, ’n’ he wouldn’t be here. Take ’im home! He’ll go three poun’ ’n’ a half. I never see a more perfeck fish.”



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“Let him go,” she answered, rubbing her aching wrist.

The guide laid the bass in the water. The erstwhile tiger righted himself leisurely but grandly, sank a foot or two, and vanished as swiftly as the shadow of a flying bird.

“You’re th’ best sport, Miss Wynne, I ever see!”

“Thanks. How many bait left?”

“Four,” after a glance into the bait-pail.

“He will not die?”

“Nope; they wa’n’t no blood on him. ’S long’s they don’t bleed none they’re all right. But it ain’t no use lettin’ th’ bleeders go back. They make a big fuss at th’ start-off; but they comes up sooner ’r later, ’n’ th’ gulls git ’em.”

“Brave things!”

“That’s ’cause you’re a real fisherman, miss. Some o’ th’ folks as fish from the vil-lage ain’t pertickler whut they git in th’ box. We ain’t brought home a fish under fourteen inches. An’ when I tell th’ boys that you

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throw back two 'n' three pounders, why, they gimme th' haw-haw. Ketch 'em again, sez I. Whut folks want? They want th' air 'n' the sunshine, th' gittin' up early 'n' th' gittin' t' bed early, 'n' livin' like human bein's fer a few days: A two-poun' bass 'll do more'n any pill *I* ever heard of."

The girl laughed. In the few days she had been up here she had grown quite fond of the old man at the oars. There was more in his native philosophy than in many books.

"They's a young feller comes up here who's jes' like you. Sport all th' way through. Ketches 'nough fer shore-dinner 'n' chucks th' rest back. They ain't no sale o' bass these days; but that didn't make no difference with him. It was th' game. He al-lus throwed th' little ones back. Wanted 'em t' grow. He ain't be'n up here this year. Like's not he's gallivantin' in Chiny. He's caught sharks, miss, gone whalin' 'n' all that, but he allus comes back here. They ain't nuthin' like black bass."

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“Nothing in this wide world,” she agreed.

The guide baited the hook, cast it far out, took up the oars and rowed toward the island.

The girl shaded her eyes and looked off Kingston way, through the boat channels; then back to the island, on which her gaze became fixed, with a little perpendicular line above her nose as a mute commentary on the state of her mind: worry. Pidgin Island, a whitewashed light towering above a dilapidated dwelling and a paralytic boat-house, all amid a jumble of boulders and sickly boscage. At lunch she had gone up into the light and below she had seen the treacherous shoals which stretched out their sinister arms like a gigantic starfish. Pidgin Island, a desolate spot if ever there was one: man-forsaken in the winter and apparently God-forsaken always. Had she not picked up the poor little land birds which had beaten out their lives the night before against the cruel brilliant glass?

Uncle Billy wondered what she was thinking about. He knew little enough of woman

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and her subtle ways, for all that he had been married these thirty long years. His lore began when he left the house in the morning and ended when he entered it again at night. He knew that they wanted gewgaws on Sunday and a new hat twice a year; wanted attention; wanted compliments whenever they turned out a good bit of cooking; gossiped and smiled away one another's reputation; yes, he knew this much. But he couldn't understand why two women who hated each other like poison were always sure to kiss when they met on the street; why they told the truth over big issues and lied like sixty over little ones; why they always wanted to marry the good-looking scalawags and sometimes did, and took a wallop regularly Saturday nights. Of these phases and many more Uncle Billy understood nothing; the retorts of his primitive analysis simply clogged up.

Now, here was this young woman. The

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only thing he could swear to was that she never struck a bass too hard, never lost her nerve, played 'em on equal terms with any man he had ever rowed, and he had been in the business since the age of twenty, forty years come next June. But why she insisted on fishing Pidgin Island when there were hundreds of other places, safer, with more bass and bigger ones, too, over between Fox and Grenadier Islands, for instance, even with a galeshowingitsteeth outsideitwas beyond him. Only yesterday they had got out just in time. It was all right\*with a light manageable skiff; but these contrary motor-boats needed tinkering morning, noon and night, obstinate as any woman that ever breathed. Old rollers coming in, fifty feet long, with a cap on them that sizzled along the gunwales like soda-pop; and she paid no more attention to them than if they'd been ripples on a frog-pond. And one minute she'd be fishing with all her heart in

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the game, and the next she'd be aiming those little opera-glasses toward Horseshoe Island, round which ran the channel to Kingston. Just as if she was expecting some one.

Simply couldn't make her out. Lots of women fished up here, but their husbands or their brothers were along, somewhere near. All alone she was; hired him without any argument about prices; said she'd heard about the big fellows out at Pidgin, and didn't care to fish anywhere else, and could they go there the very next morning! If a man could get out to Pidgin twice in seven days, he was doing remarkably well. The first day they had got as far as Bear Point, where the river becomes the lake. From the American mainland, the old farm dock, it had looked as calm as a Sunday inside a church. Even he, Uncle Billy, had been fooled. There was a point across the way on Wolfe Island that usually foretold what the weather was outside. When they reached Bear Point it was blowing guns, and they had to come about.

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“Why, I didn’t dream the waves could be so big on fresh water!”

“Th’ old Atlantic, miss,” he had told her, “ain’t got nuthin’ on this here patch o’ water. Th’ on’y difference’s in th’ taste.”

“Beautiful, beautiful!”

Most women would have had hysterics.

“Can any boat land at Pidgin to-day?”

“Nope, ner git off neither. We’ll fish Grimshaw’s Bay. There’ll be a little lee there. We’ll haff t’ stick t’ th’ river t’day, miss.”

“Very well.”

Half an hour passed. The white clouds were beginning to fill with lavender shadows. The brassy glare on the flat water faded into softer tones, old rose and copper. Islands afar were dimming in the settling September haze. A flock of wild geese flew over the island, honking mournfully. Against the blue in the east were stripes of mackerel and mare’s-tails; a warning that it was likely to blow on the morrow.

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"They're gone," said the girl, reeling in.

"Well, we ain't done so bad. None o' th' boys at th' village 'll beat us. You mustn't worry 'bout takin' fish home. Th' folks never knew whut bass tasted like till this new law passed 'bout not sellin' 'em. They'll eat all we can ketch."

The girl filliped the bait from the hook, attached it scientifically to a bar of the reel, and put the rod away.

"Home," she said, rearranging the cushions and tenderly rubbing the tip of her sunburned nose.

Uncle Billy shipped his oars and oiled up; and a moment later the ripples gurgled pleasantly astern.

"She's actin' like a perfeck lady t'day," he commented. "Las' month we bu'sted down out at Charity, 'n' that ain't no healthy place t' be on a windy day." He stooped and tinkered with one of the blow-offs, and the engine missed an explosion.



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The girl smiled. Uncle Billy would never let well enough alone. Whenever the engine ran ten miles without trouble, he would look hurt and astonished and proceed to investigate, generally with disastrous results.

“Jes’ like a woman. Let ’er go ’er own way, ’n’ she’s nice ’s pie; but ’f y’ want ’er t’ do sumpin *your* way, bang she goes!”

The girl shut her eyes and leaned back against the cushions. Uncle Billy stole a glance at her, over his shoulder. He knew nothing of the gods and goddesses of the Olympian days; if he had heard of Venus and Juno and Diana, it had been merely as a sound, the picture was *nil*. Still, he was not without his comparisons. The prettiest young woman he had ever seen; and up here all alone; and nobody in the village knew anything about her, nor at the farm where she boarded; wanted to fish Pidgin Island and nowhere else; tramped all over the island every day they landed for lunch, and searched the

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north as if she was waiting for some one or expected to find something. Mighty curious.

He tingled to ask questions. He could not reason it out, not possessing a mind inclining toward the psychological; but there was always something in her eyes that choked those questions as effectually as if her slim fingers had gone round his throat.

## CHAPTER II

### CRANFORD'S DILEMMA

**C**RANFORD lighted his cigar and slid his legs under the table; ease and comfort personified. With one hand in a trousers pocket, the other caressing the thick roll of aromatic tobacco, his eyes narrowed dreamily, he presented the enviable picture of a man who was absolutely care-free. But this attitude no more deceived me than beauty does; it was only skin-deep. In Cranford's soul there was a canker and I knew that in a moment or two he would come back to the rude business of life.

"Why can't it always be like this?" he complained. "Why should I have to bear the brunt of a fool grandfather's didoes, who threw away half a dozen fortunes on horses and cards and Niblo's beauties? My poor

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dad killed himself trying to save something out of the wreck. And now, look at the work I have to do!"

"It's honest, Cran," I said.

"Piffle! From certain points of view, yes; it's honest to you, it's honest to the government that pays me, and all that; but down in my soul I know it to be a vile business—profit in the dishonesty of others, often my friends."

"They know the law. When they break it they get only what's coming to them."

"Oh, I know that. But to hang around them in Paris or Rome or London, to spy on them like a common policeman, and then to betray them, to meet them at the same clubs and offer condolences, I tell you it's a rank business. If I hadn't been born and bred a gentleman——"

"Ha! Now we have it. Pride of tradition; thistles and weeds that choke the life out of good edible potatoes. Pride which looks back only so far, to the plateau and the castle-

## CRANFORD'S DILEMMA

keep, which refuses to see the valley below and the fierce long climb up. You never think of the old chap who started the game originally, and maybe died half-way up; rough-handed, rough-hearted, rough-bodied, not afraid of work, of battle. Nobody has a kind word for the roots of the family-tree; I mean the roots down in the ground, not the trunk. Family pride! A punk to your piffle! Pride is good only when it serves to make us stand on our own two legs. Born and bred a gentleman has done more harm——”

“Man, am I a cad, after all?” Cranford looked hurt.

“No, boy; you’re as clean and fine as they make ’em; but I want to get it out of your mind that work such as you do is beneath you. Nothing of the kind. You wouldn’t mind being a military attaché in Japan or in Germany, would you? No. What is the diplomatic service anyhow but spying in fashionable clothes, mufti and military? You’re working

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along another arm, that's all, free to come, free to go; and not more than a baker's dozen know what you are doing. On the other hand, quit if it hurts you."

"I can't. You know very well that I'm good for nothing else. I want an income of about seven thousand a year. It's in my blood to like cigars such as this one is; luxuries. Do you suppose I'd have gone into it at all if it hadn't been for that? Oh, lord! I'm grateful enough to you for landing me the job; but it has made me mighty discontented with myself. To wander from April till October over there, an ordinary bloodhound in the latest fashion, keeping tab on every jeweler, who is generally as big a sneak as I am, and sharing half the gains with him. It's a bad business. I'm getting so that I can't look a man straight in the eyes any more."

"How about the other side of the medal?"

"What?"

"The real thieves?"

"Oh, that's sport. The odds are even; give

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and take. That's the phase which makes it possible for me to keep up front when I shave myself. They know exactly where they stand, and a few of them know that I know. For the deuce of it is, some of them have found me out, and have threatened me. That's the one reason why I'm home now. I've got to lie low for a while. A bad crowd because every one of them has brains. On my word, I know but three of them, and there are twenty working the racket. I wear a Van Dyke over there; grow it before I start and cut it off on the way home. Friends chaff me, thinking I'm trying to foreignize myself. But the other people mean no real harm. Why should a rich country like this demand so much intolerable duty? Aren't we heavily taxed as it is? I tell you that the general run of smuggling is nothing more than a sense of reprisal. They do not look upon it as thieving at all. They are not bringing things into the country to sell again."

"Treason, treason!" I murmured softly.

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“Bosh!”

“We’ll let it go as you say. But let me tell you what the real trouble is, Cran. You don’t know, but I do.” Solemnly I went through the mimicry of casting a line, of paying out, of striking, of playing, and all that rigmarole so dear to the fisherman’s heart. Cranford grinned. “Homing Dock,” I went on, “and Fox and Grenadier, and Mud Creek, Sand Bay, Wolfe Island and the Horseshoe! Eh? And the call of the duck and the geese and the foolish loon, and the dip of the hell-diver, and the croak of the mud-hens in the rushes, and the bald eagle in the dead pine top. And don’t forget Pidgin Island, with the bar that goes northerly and the ledge where the old sock-dolagers lie in wait for the chub and shiner and crab. Thirty feet of line straight down and the skill of a sleight-o’-hand man to beat ’em as they break for the surface! What?”

“I know more about that country in one minute than you’d learn in twenty years.”

“Right-o!” I admitted. “And why the



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dickens don't you skip town to-night and stay up there till the middle of October? Get your tackle and hike, boy."

"I haven't been up there since a year ago last June."

"Wire old Uncle Billy; and to-morrow at this time you'll be eating boned bass and green corn and washing it down with the finest coffee ever brewed. Lord! how I wish I didn't have to write yarns for a living. I'd go with you quickly enough. But I've had my vacation."

"Where'd you go?" eagerly at last.

I smiled.

"Hang it, have you been up there?"—resentfully. "Did you have Uncle Billy row you? How'd they run? August? I'll bet you!"

"And got caught out at Charity Shoals in a thundering blow; and Billy's bally old engine broke down and I had to row while he pattered with some twenty odd spark-plugs. Great day. Got the limit. Wet as a dishrag.

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Got back to the hotel about seven. Broke down six times; and all the while the sea was running bigger and bigger. She can blow some up there, believe me. Hundreds of miles of clean sweep for the wind."

"I'll do it!" said Cranford. "I'll go to-night. Clean out my soul up there in the open. I want to get away from human beings. I wonder why I didn't think of it? Pay the waiter, and we'll go down to Park Place and fool away the rest of the afternoon looking over tackle."

I was willing enough. At four-thirty Cranford had purchased three Bristols, two fine Leonards, a thousand yards of line, and leaders and hooks and sinkers. Fishermen—I mean true fishermen—are odd chaps. They may have a garret full of serviceable tackle, yet regularly each season they buy new rods, new lines, new reels; and nine times out of ten the old rod, the old line, the old reel, these do the work. The most delightful brain-storm in

## CRANFORD'S DILEMMA<sup>1</sup>

the world, the pleasantest mania, this foraging in the garret for the tackle-box, this testing of old rods, and the final visit to the outfitters. Even the trivial affair of purchasing a railway ticket is not without its charm. You become all at once an enviable being—to other men. Everybody looks at you pleasantly and smiles; they know and understand. Your tackle-box (which will not fit in any kit-bag known) and your rod-case make patent to the world at large your coming adventures. Envied indeed, for not all of us may surrender to this primitive longing. Even those of us who may not go give thanks that something remains to call us back to the open. So little one needs upon these adventures; a few changes of clothes, and a Bible written by a man named Ike Walton, maybe, tucked away in your pocket. That's life for you!

I bade Cranford good-by at the subway. And as I had nothing to do with this strange tale save to push Cranford into it, innocently

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enough, I'll say good-by to you, too. Exit, then, "first person, singular, perpendicular." Enter, several villains, and strife and turmoil, and peace and calm, and roseate romance.

In a bedroom of one of the glitter-clutter hotels on Broadway there sat a man. He was all of that; deep of chest, powerful of frame, with a head as picturesque as a lion's. A workaday chap, he was; no hawk-beak, no sweeping black mustache, so dear to the penny-dreadful. His face was round, a brief commentary on the best of cooks. He had remarkable control of that face: he could make it jolly, pleasant, whimsical; a capital asset in his business. However, just now it was not a pleasant face to look upon. There was venom in his eyes and venom on his tongue and venom in his heart. Plain sailing, unless you crossed him; easy going, unless you caused him to stumble; then, watch out. From time to time he nursed the bandaged leg propped by several pillows.

"Get him, I say; get him. He's one of the

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swell vultures. His room was next to mine at the Continental. He tumbled to the crutches. Nice little keyhole boy. Well, now we know the man; and he knows practically no one but me. Go for him; break him."

"How?" asked the young man by the window.

"Haven't you got any brains? Must I think for everybody?"

"Keep a civil tongue in your head." The young man turned. His brown eyes were as hard and cold as the blue ones of the older man. It was a handsome, lean, well-bred face, first glance; but scrutiny revealed an astonishing number of flaws. What nature had generously intended to be boyish beauty, some inner force, working outward, had nullified. He, too, could wear his mask: be charming, winning. Between these two men there was no mummery; they knew each other's masks too well. "What you want done is to break him, socially."

"Break him socially!" snarled the older

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man. He eased his leg. "He's a bachelor. You can't break that kind, socially."

The young man shrugged. "Find out if he has been holding up any of his friends. Get positive facts that he is connected with the Customs. If he is on the level, he's had to give away his friends. Tip them off. I know something about that class. They will not have that kind of a man in their clubs. You can't bash in a man's head like you used to. Shut doors in his face. That's the gaff he'll twist on."

"Not a bad idea."

"Thanks. Eight thousand gone to glory."

"Eight. Wouldn't let me pay duty. Confiscated them; and your swell gets his fifty-fifty for his little game of I-spy. If I hadn't broken this leg! It will be three weeks before I can use it. Push the button."

"The button won't help you. Leave that stuff alone."

"Hoity-toity! I know what I want. Push it."

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The young man did so, not without open contempt. "I'll start out. It will be a job, but I believe I can handle it."

"And this other affair coming off, with me here like a dead man."

"I have told you that that will be handled all right. Besides, it is my concern, anyhow."

"Where did you get them?"

"That also is my affair. If you want my advice, you'll stick to this room till the thing is done. They may follow you."

"You're deep, boy."

"Ah!"—non-committally. "I'll be in again, late to-night. Keep awake if you can."

"With this leg I won't have any trouble."

Meanwhile Cranford went directly to his apartments. He had arrived in America only the day before. He found his man taking off the sheets from the furniture. All the windows were open. The air that blew in was mild and summery. It was a promise of good weather.

"Don't bother, Warren, about fixing the

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rooms. I have decided to go up to the lake and fish for three or four weeks."

"Yes, sir."

"You haven't bought any groceries?"

"No, sir."

"Then you can while away the time on your truck-farm till I notify you of my return. Get out my fishing stuff and the old kit-bag. You know exactly what I shall need."

"You'll be taking your guns, sir?"

"Might as well. And slip in the automatic while you're about it. It's some sport potting cans and bottles."

"I'll attend to everything, sir. What time shall I meet you at the station?"

"Somewhere around midnight. Train leaves at twelve."

"Just before you came a man called."

"Who?"

"He wouldn't give his name, sir. Letter of introduction, he said. When I told him you had just returned from Europe, he said he'd call again."



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Master and man looked at each other steadily.

"Well?"

"Very good-looking chap, sir, well dressed; only, I didn't like his smile."

"Have you ever seen him before?"

"His face is new to me, sir."

Cranford walked over to one of the windows and gazed seriously at the touch of color across the river in the wooded highlands. Suspicion is not good for the soul; and he was beginning to find that all strange faces aroused distrust. How he hated it all, this life of his! How like he was to that pasty-faced boy at school who was forever running with tales to the teacher! A sneak, so whispered his pride and breeding; an honest competence, spoke his manhood. Cheats, liars and thieves; and his business was to watch them, warn the government and take his tithe of the spoils. It was the tithe which had the acid bite. If only he were doing it for the sport, the adventure! But, no; he wanted money and the good things money bought.

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His friends. Many a time, over coffee, they had confided to him how neatly they were going to bamboozle Uncle Sam when they landed. In honor he could not warn them to be still; in honor he had to make known their childlike confessions. This kept his spirit wrestling always. More than once he had been tempted to take a plunge in Wall Street. One throw of the dice; riches or beggary. And he hadn't the nerve!

Between him and his prodigal grandfather stood the memory of that bulwark of caution, his father. Having *his* father as an example, he became all caution; caution hesitated when opportunity knocked and lost many chances to reestablish the fortunes of the House of Cranford. He quitted life with exactly what he had begun with. The grandson had just enough to weather his club dues and his tailors, with a little left over for his fishing trips. The economy he now practised was beginning to tell. His bank-account was growing and

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growing. In three or four years he would have enough to live on comfortably. Marriage was, however, an utter impossibility; for he was determined never to marry a woman whose income was greater than his own; and he knew that he could never be happy with one who was not his equal in breeding and education. Blame environment for this fallacy.

“Describe him.”

“Slender, rather dark, medium height, good hands, clean-shaven, with a little white scar on the left side of his chin.”

Cranford mused for a space. “Can’t place him. Oh, well; it doesn’t matter. Maybe nothing at all. If he has a letter of introduction. . . . Dash, it, Warren, you and I are beginning to be suspicious of everybody.”

“Well, sir, we can’t afford to be careless, now that you’ve started to break up the gang.”

“I don’t think they’ll bother me seriously on this side of the water. It’s the only thing that makes the game possible—the real smuggler.

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with his ramifications that reach into the heart of India. It's a good sporting proposition to lay those fellows by the heels. Their ingenuity is remarkable. Smead was held up yesterday. Broke his leg in Paris. Mahogany crutches. Hollow shaft, twenty diamonds worth eight thousand. His leg was really broken; and I suppose that gave him the idea of utilizing the crutches. Bought the gems in Rotterdam. The crutches stuck in my mind. My room was next to his in the Continental in Paris. It was only guesswork on my part. I didn't know for certain. Well, I'm off. I'll wear this suit on the train. Don't forget my pipes. See you at the station."

Cranford went to his club for dinner. He found three or four lonely bachelors, old friends; and they sat at the same table. Talk ran into every conceivable channel: women, horses, the light operas then going, boating, boxing, and even the discomfiture of the famous gambler Smead, who had been caught

## CRANFORD'S DILEMMA

finally with the goods on his return from Europe. Cranford's coffee tasted bitter.

Before going to the station he went into the bar of one of the near-by hotels for some cigars. He was leaning against the cigar-stand, next to the bar, when two strangers at his side clicked their glasses and spoke a phrase that puzzled and surprised him.

"Pidgin Island!"

"Square away!"

The two men drank and departed.

Pidgin Island! Cranford turned. They had paused at the cashier's desk. One was tall, thick-set, gray-haired, ruddy-faced, with an air of prosperity. His companion was short and wiry and taciturn of expression. His lip was adorned by a cropped mustache which stood out like the bristles of a tooth-brush. Cranford laughed silently. Fishermen like himself; for only a bass fisherman would ever mention such a spot as Pidgin Island. Doubtless he would see them again. Ah, to-morrow, to-

## PIDGIN ISLAND

morrow! He was a boy again; he forgot that he had lost all his illusions, forgot the secret service, forgot everything but the delectable spot, with its bays and promontories, its islands and shoals, its sport royal.

By the ticket-booth he met Warren.

"The man with the scar has been wandering about. I have an idea that he's been following me."

"Did he get a ticket?"

"Takes the Montreal express."

"I'd like to have a good look at him. It might come in handy some day. But still, it may be some one I met in the smoke-room coming over."

"Your train leaves in twenty minutes, sir. You can go aboard now if you wish. Suppose we wander out to the gates? You go ahead and I'll follow with the porter. If I see him I'll tip you off, sir."

"Good idea."

Warren loitered about the stairs. (The ter-

## CRANFORD'S DILEMMA

minal had not been finished at this time.) He scanned the faces of the prospective travelers who had gathered about the various gates. Suddenly he held up his hand and disappeared up the stairs. Nonchalantly Cranford followed.

“He is standing by your gate, sir, watching.”

“Wonder what the dickens it’s all about?”

“Gray fedora. Now, I’ll bid you good-by, sir. He may or may not know you; but if he saw me with you, he’d know. I’ll make for the street. Here’s the tickets, sir. If anything turns up, I’ll wire; and if you need me, send.”

The two shook hands. There was admiration on both sides and no little affection. Warren did not depend upon Cranford’s bounty. He had a truck-farm over in New Jersey that paid him well. He was like a man who had tasted a rare vintage; all other wines palled. He was adventurous in spirit, and once upon a time Cranford had plucked him out of the rut of commonplace; a wild scramble over roofs; the spat-spat of bullets against brick and stone,

## PIDGIN ISLAND

down into a strange skylight, and a mad dash for the street. Smugglers of the lower grade, bent upon reprisal.

Presently Cranford passed out of the gates to his Pullman. The dark handsome young man with the scar on his chin was absolutely unknown to him. What did he want? What was in the air?

The young man immediately left the gate. Farther up the line he stopped to speak to a short and wiry man with a bristling mustache.

"I'm going back to Smead. I'll follow in a few days. Keep under cover. Go fishing. I'll write you a description of this Cranford chap. He's leaving to-night for the American side."

"What?"

"Yes. Got his guns and fishing tackle. May be a blind; again he may know nothing. Up to you two to find out. If he's really fishing, why, there's no worry; we need not change any of our plans. Besides, he never works on this side. Fish, you two. Put up a bluff, any-



## CRANFORD'S DILEMMA

how. No cards, no whisky. The old man'll break you if you slip up through carelessness. Good luck!"

Half an hour later he was back in Smead's room.

"Well, boy!"

"Cranford left to-night for the river. Now, don't get excited. He had his guns and tackle. Probably goes to fish and hunt. His valet has gone over to Jersey. It's not possible that Cranford knows anything; but he has the devil's own luck in falling on to things. I'm going to get into his rooms to-night and take a look at his correspondence. I want indisputable proof."

"Don, you've got nerve. Where did you get it?"

"Maybe a little from you; maybe a little from her. She must have had nerve to marry you, knowing what she did."

"Leave your mother out of this talk. What's the matter with you lately, anyhow?"

## PIDGIN ISLAND

“ Gets under your ribs to think of her, eh? ”

“ After all, I am your father.” He spoke calmly. He knew of old the futility of loosening the heat of his wrath against this boy, who always grew correspondingly cold and mocking.

“ To papa, lovingly from his son Donald,” said the young man, in a high piping childish voice. Then he whirled upon the man in the chair. “ Maudlin sentiment from you doesn’t fit in. Drop it. If I’m your son, it’s only one of those chances of life. I had nothing to do with it. I’m merely your lieutenant. I’m in the game for the sport and the cash. In one thing only do I differ from you: I never break my word, and don’t you to me. Very few persons know that I am Michael Smead’s son. For that I’m grateful. You stay here in New York. I’ll handle this job. Going up-town now to Cranford’s.”

For a space of thirty seconds he stared icily into his father’s eyes; shrugged, and made for

## CRANFORD'S DILEMMA

the door which he opened and closed gently enough.

Smead glared at the drab panels, but saw only the pictures and tableaux of a ragged life. Did he regret any of it? At that moment he could not say. But fear of a kind crept into his lion-like heart. What lay in the soul of this offspring of his?

## CHAPTER III

### "THEY AIN'T NO SECH THING"

**I**T was raining pitchforks. Across the river, through the opalescent blur, one could see the old sou'-westers piling up on the point, just a little farther each time, for a wild sea was running in from the lake. You could hear the roar of them as they broke against the granite promontory, two miles away. Sometimes there would be seething white patches on the river's face, where the wind spitefully slashed down the rain. One or two hardy souls were fishing hopelessly along the mainland ledges, where there was a bit of lee. The knowing fisherman, however, saved his bait. The bass by now were all out in deep water, for the black fellow doesn't like the seasicky rollers any more than his hunter does; besides, what was more im-

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portant, bait had left the shallows and gone out of the reach of the mud. It was a day for poker, the telling of tales, or reading and snoozing; or tinkering in the boat-house.

And tinkering in the boat-house was precisely what Uncle Billy was doing. Ranged along the top of his work-shelf were dozens of spark-plugs. Next to bringing home a four pounder, he liked to tinker. His attitude and outlook were identical to those of the village doctor; no matter how well you looked or felt, something wrong could be found going on in your insides. Only, Uncle Billy acquired no profit in his diagnoses. With a grease-smudged hand he nursed his stubbly unshaven chin.

“Gast it; seven plugs, ’n’ not one of ’em wuth a darn. Whut’s folks sellin’ these days, anyhow?”

“Search me!” said a voice from the rear doorway.

“By jings!” Uncle Billy hastily wiped his fingers on a piece of waste and trotted to the

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door. "'F I didn't know they wa'n't no sech thing as a ghost! . . . How are you, Mr. Cranford? When'd y' git here? 'S morn-in'? Well, well! A livin' gale outside. Rainin' barb-wire 'n' pitchforks. No bass in shaller water t'morrow. We'll try Homing Dock 'n' mebbe th' wreck in Sand Bay. . . . Oh, pshaw! I can't row you, Mr. Cranford. Got a party. No idea how long she's goin' t' stay neither. Why'd n't y' write me?"

"One at a time, Bill; one at a time. Go back to your work. I'll tell you all I know when I've prowled about and kind of soaked this picture into my soul."

Cranford shook the water off his hat and stamped his feet. He had come cross-lots, through the high grass; and the very skwunch-skwunch of the wet leather on his feet was music, an obligato to the slap-swish, slap-swish of the river which sprawled over and about the runway sloping down from the boat-house doors. This was air, washed clean, clear from

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the heavens, undefiled by smoke or dust or contact with living things, nectarous, God’s own. He leaned against the jamb, breathing, breathing, with a little smack of the lips just before he let each breath go. He wanted the good of it in his veins, in his marrow. In another day he would forget that he had ever been anything but an outdoor man, of simple habits, simple thoughts. How well he knew every nook and corner of these wonderful waters! Europe, Asia, Africa and the South Sea Isles, North and South America he knew; but none of them called like this quiet but rugged spot. Often, while sitting on the balconies or verandas of notable foreign hotels, his thought had annihilated the distance. He could see boat after boat coming in toward evening, the catch thrown carelessly on the dock; he could hear the banter of the bronzed guides, the bragging of the fishermen, and the hotel bartender’s polite—“Well, what luck to-day, sir?”

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Uncle Billy, vainly pretending to squint at the business end of a spark-plug held between his eyes and the light, watched his young friend covertly. Didn't look as fit as usual. Been staying up late and lying abed mornings. Two or three days on the water would take that look out of his face.

"Lester in from Reed's?" asked Cranford presently.

"Yestiddy."

"Any one got him?"

"Nope. I'll have him around at th' hotel after supper. He'll be tickled t' death t' row you. He's in luck. Two good fishermen in one season. He's th' best guide up here. Mighty good o' you to stick t' me all these years. But y' see, it don't make no difference t' you who rows. You know where t' go 'n' how t' fish; 'n' when you don't git 'em nobuddy does."

Cranford laughed; and instantly it occurred to him that this was the first time he had laughed honestly in months.

"Y' see, Lester's a borned guide; whut he



## "THEY AIN'T NO SECH THING"

don't know 'bout birds 'n' fish. . . . Why, th' game commissioners could go t' school with him 'n' larn a hull lot. Bring th' guns?"

"Yes."

"Lots o' black duck this year. Th' mallard ain't showed up yet."

"Who is the lady you are rowing?"

Uncle Billy laid down the spark-plug gently. "You'll think I'm stuffin' you, but I ain't, Mr. Cranford. Say, I'd like t' see you 'n' her in th' same boat on a day when they ain't bitin' fast."

"Oho! Off with the old love, on with the new! Do you mean to tell me that you have at last found a woman who knows how to strike a bass?"

"Guess so. On'y woman I ever see who gits 'em out at Pidgin. An' when she strikes 'em she ain't makin' no effort t' h'ist 'em down t' Oswego."

Cranford shouted. "Billy, you're good for my soul."

"An' you're good for sore eyes, Mr. Cran-

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ford. Fished you when y' wore short pants. Your paw was some fisherman, I tell you!"

"He was a good man to his son, Billy." Cranford stepped away from the gasoline tank and reached under his rain-coat for his pipe. He sat down on a soap-box at Uncle Billy's side and smoked a while in silence. "What's she look like?"

"Oho!" mimicked Uncle Billy. "I thought y'd be askin' that. Well, I don't know whut *you'd* call her, seeing' 's you've seen all kinds o' purty womin in your gaddin's. She ain't more 'n twenty-two. Her name's Wynne. An' there y' be. Nobuddy knows nuthin' more, where she comes from, who 'er folks be 'n' all that. She's stayin' out at th' farm. She ain't one o' them sassiety folks 'cause she ain't got no lugs. Jes' 's easy t' git along with 's you are. Why, say! I fished a man in June who let his sinker rest on bottom all th' time, 'n' cussed me 'cause we didn't git no bass fer shore-dinner. Honest!"

"Is she pretty?"

## “THEY AIN’T NO SECH THING”

“Oho!” Uncle Billy cocked his battered hay-maker’s straw hat over his eye. “Whut d’ *you* call purty?”—diplomatically.

Cranford smiled up into the sun-bitten, wind-bitten face. “Well?”

Tap-tap!

Cranford stood up, while Uncle Billy reached hurriedly for the waste, wiping his hands on it thoroughly, with a finishing scrape along the sides of his grease-stained, paint-stained jumpers.

The latch clicked, the rear door opened, and a young woman entered. Her rain-coat sparkled and flashed; tendrils of rain-drenched hair straggled down her cheeks from under an ordinary sou’-wester; her heavy tans oozed from lace to sole, and a diminutive rain-storm pattered down from the hem of the coat.

“You, Miss Wynne, in all this rain?” gasped Uncle Billy.

“Came in for the mail and something to read. . . . Oh, I beg your pardon!”

Cranford’s pipe, with its smoldering coal,

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went into a pocket; his hat off his head. A Diana, adaptive to the modes; health and beauty were written in every line of her face, with a hint of distinction and breeding in the calm untroubled eyes.

“This is Mr. Cranford I was tellin’ you ’bout, Miss Wynne.” Uncle Billy’s wave of the hand was meant for an introduction. That Cranford and the young woman might be at the poles socially did not trouble him. He would have presented a stevedore to a grand duchess, happen they both stopped long enough in his boat-house.

“I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Cranford.” She did not offer her hand; but she was as quick to read distinction and breeding as he was. “I feel as if I’d been poaching. Uncle Billy”—how oddly the name sounded from her lips!—“has been your guide so long that you will not enjoy the sport without him.”

“Don’t you let that worry y’ none, Miss Wynne,” interposed the guide. “He’s goin’ t’



I feel as if I'd been poaching



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have Lester, who can outrow 'n' outfish me any day in th' week. An' between you 'n' me 'n' th' gate-post, he'd rather have 'im." Uncle Billy's sentences sometimes resembled the buzz and murmur of bumblebees.

"Billy, I'd rather have Lester than any one besides you."

"Taffy!" sniffed Billy. "I got a sweet-tooth yet; go on."

The girl laughed freely. Music. She walked to the runway and peered out. "It will be clear by sunset," was her comment.

Uncle Billy looked at Cranford as if to say—"There! whut 'd I tell you?"

"The rain will wear down the wind. I shouldn't be surprised if we had flat water tomorrow. How about bait?"—still with her gaze upon the rolling mountains which criss-crossed the river.

"Plenty in th' car at th' big boat-house. We'll just haff t' fish Pidgin. They won't be anywheres 'cept in deep water."

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“ You have fished Pidgin, Miss Wynne? ”

“ Yes. And I dare say you have, many times.”

“ Since I was fifteen, when we had to row out there.”

“ Twenty years ago,” supplemented Uncle Billy, sighing reminiscently.

“ That’s a fine way to treat a friend!” exclaimed Cranford. “ Telling my age like that!”

Another ripple of laughter from the girl.

“ Have you noted the variety of currents out there?” she asked. “ One day you can fish straight down the ledge; another, the line forms a curve back to the shoal; and again, you can’t do anything but ride up and down the bar.”

“ Pidgin is all right in July and August; but this time of the year the wind blows from all points of the compass in a day; and it’s a bad place for a man to fish. Billy ought not to take you out there except when the water is flat. A motor-boat is only as strong as its engine. I was blown out to Galoo once in September. A



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norther came up all of a sudden. For a while we thought it was all up with us. They found us the next afternoon, half dead with cold and hunger.”

“I’m not afraid,” she replied to this open warning, which was only an echo of Uncle Billy’s. Her chin stood out a little. “I love it out at Pidgin. It is wild and free there. If a gale comes up, one can not run back to the hotel; one has to fight it out. I was born at sea.” She turned her face toward the rain again.

“Hey! Mr. Cranford; I smell sumpin burn-in’.”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed Cranford, making a dash past the girl and out on the slippery runway. He knelt quickly, soaked his pocket and ruefully extracted his pipe.

“What a terrible thing forgetfulness is!” observed the girl gravely, though her eyes twinkled. “And I have been used to tobacco smoke for several years.”

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"It's mighty good of you not to laugh," said Cranford. "That's my favorite pipe, and it will take three or four days to sweeten it again."

"Live 'n' larn," Uncle Billy said, sweeping up his spark-plugs and dumping them into a box. He then reached under the bench into a pail and brought forth a handful of scarlet harvest apples.

And immediately there were sounds (*pianissimo*, *moderato* and *sforzando*) which are permitted only among truly democratic individuals. It was the final stroke; it accomplished more than all the polished phrases of social diplomacy could have done. Till the end of time these three would be more than casual acquaintances.

At length Miss Wynne announced that she must be going. They were waiting for her at the village post-office. Cranford held the door for her. She smiled and nodded. Alone out-

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side, the rain drumming on the sou’-wester, she eyed the scudding leaden fogs overhead.

“Cranford: I must be very careful. Why is he here at this time? And I am so alone, so alone!”

She stepped forward resolutely, as one born to the open; the heavy dank grasses swished and slapped about her shoes. When she reached the wooden sidewalk she paused for a moment to stamp her feet; then hurried on into the village.

“Well!” said Uncle Billy triumphantly.

“Billy,” Cranford drawled, burlesquing a facial bewilderment to hide his real confusion, —“Billy, they ain’t no sech thing!”

## CHAPTER IV

### A SPY

“**T**HAT coat o’ yourn’ll haff t’ go t’ th’ tailor. Th’ rain’ll wear down th’ wind. Ever hear a woman talk like that?”

“That’s what I meant, Billy; we’ve just been dreaming. I’ve fished up here, as you say, twenty years, and I never heard any other woman say so much in so little. And if you say she knows the game, that’s enough. Born at sea. Did you hear her say that?”

Uncle Billy nodded. “It’s more’n I’ve larned th’ hull week. No wonder she ain’t afraid o’ Pidgin ’r Charity. But that ain’t it.”

“What isn’t?”

“Th’ thing that gits me. She ain’t never be’n up here before. I didn’t haff t’ ask ’er that. An’ th’ firs’ thing she sez—‘D’ you think

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we can git out t' Pidgin Islan' t'morrow?' That kinda flabbergasted me. On'y them that knows ever talks o' Pidgin."

"And you toddled right out there, with never a word of the risk."

"Mr. Cranford, I be'n married thutty year."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"I don't argy none with womin. She wanted t' go t' Pidgin; t' Pidgin she goes. You needn't worry; I ain't hankerin' after suicide. Wouldn't take th' king o' England out there, 'f it didn't look good. Nuthin' panicky 'bout Miss Wynne. She ain't cryin' none fer life-belts. An', man, I like 'er. She's one o' them *rary avises* y' read 'bout. An' whut d' y' think? Picked up two orioles 'n' a yellerebird that'd busted their heads off against th' light, 'n' had a privit funeral back o' th' light-keeper's boat-house. Buried 'em. Odd bein's, some o' them; huh?"

"Tender-hearted; h'm. Kills Mr. Bass with pleasure, but weeps over little dead birds. How do you add that up?" Cranford took out his

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pipe and wiped it thoroughly inside and out with a bit of waste.

"I ain't addin'," answered Uncle Billy, flinging his third apple-core into the basin outside, where some hardy perch snubbed it about as if playing water-polo. "I've fished her fer a week now, 'n' ain't brought back nuthin' but th' bleeders. Lets 'em go every time they ain't hurt."

Cranford settled his hat firmly and turned down the brim. "If she does that, Billy, you're right; she is a *rary avises*, as you call them. How's the old *Navarre* running these days?"

"Same 's usual."

"I see; you will not let off tinkering with her." Cranford patted the gunwale. The name always stirred his sense of humor. It had been Billy's selection.

"Navarre," some one had said. "That's a good name."

"You bet!"

"Name of a king."

"An' any queen might be proud o' namin'

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her son after a hoss that could run like that 'n'."

After the unmerciful banter which had annually followed this episode, some guides would have hastened to change the name. Billy clung to it stubbornly. He clung to his opinions stubbornly, his weather prognostications, his lore concerning bass. He erred sometimes because he was human; but the saying went that when he couldn't drop his mudhook over a school of bass, it was time to pack up the rods.

"Well, send Lester over to the hotel after dinner to-night. He'll find me in the billiard-room. I've got some letters to write before lunch. And maybe I'll find some mail."

"All right. I'll see t' Lester."

"And to-morrow I'll go out to Pidgin and hook 'em right from under your old mud-scow."

"Uh-huh. I've heard 'em say that before. I'm tellin' you she can fish. An' I don't know 's I want t' fish you now, anyhow."

Cranford filled his pockets with apples. "I'll

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tell you what I'll do. I'll bet a box of any cigars in the village that I beat you out to-morrow."

"Fifty cigars against fifty apples, 'n' I'll go you."

"Done."

"Ten-cent straights?"

"Two for a quarter, if you like. By-by. It was good to see you again, Billy. By the way, has any one caught a four and a half pounder over in the gut at Horseshoe?"

"Not that I've heard tell of. Oh, y' needn't worry. That ol' sogger's nosin' around there yet. That's whut comes o' tryin' them new-fangled hooks. He'll go five now, 'f some blame pamprey-eel ain't et him up sideways. But I'm savin' him fer Miss Wynne."

"Piffle!"

"That's right; spring one o' them foreign words on me so's I can't talk back."

Cranford stepped outside, into the rain. The sky promised no let-up. There wasn't a break



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anywhere; but these sudden squalls of wind and stinging sheets of rain he read sailor-wise. Before sundown the storm would be gone. Where had the girl picked up such lore? Born at sea, so she had said. Perhaps a sailor's daughter. But in that case fresh-water would not appeal to her. And where had she learned to fish for bass? Wisconsin, Maine, the Rideau? The sou'-wester, the dripping-rain-coat, the soaked shoes were as vivid to his understanding as written words: here was a girl out of the ordinary, brave and resourceful, perhaps companionable, an essential lacking in nine-tenths of the women he knew. Wynne. It was a good name; but he could not recollect having heard it episodically. Some millionaire's daughter, probably, who did not depend upon others for her amusements. The world was changing its habits fast. Women carried banners through the streets, rode airships, successfully cantered in and out of the stock market, along with their biscuit-making.

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So long as the biscuit remained light and edible, what mattered the ballot?

A telegram awaited Cranford at the hotel desk. It was from Warren, in the code upon which they had long since agreed. The reading of it did not cause Cranford any pleasurable emotion. It announced that his rooms had been entered and papers scattered about. Much good that would do them. Still, he wired back: "See if small Morocco note-book is in secret drawer at side of my shaving-dresser." Not one chance in a million of their stumbling upon that drawer. And yet, he was not dealing with ordinary men. There were other Empire shaving-dressers. The little worry grew as the hours went by. If that note-book was gone, gone likewise would be his occupation: for within its covers was the whole story, from the first to the last exploit, together with his profits. Heretofore he had carried it on his person; but the mysterious rifling of his luggage in the stateroom had made him wary. He cared nothing for the

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threats or physical encounters, and doubtless they knew this. To speak in the vernacular, they were after him where he lived. Once his occupation became known publicly, good-by to many things. No money in the world would make up for what he would lose. He knew his kind tolerably well. They would quietly request him to resign from his clubs, and presently door after door would close in his face. If he stood out in the open as a hunter of great criminals, a detective, he would be lauded for his work, written up in the magazines, celebrated; but deep in the heart of every traveler there abides a smoldering fire, low yet ugly, against all Customs, its agents especially, here or abroad. This rebellion is as old as man: he hates to pay tribute, justly or unjustly. . . . Spy. He was that, no more, no less. And he faced outlawry because he wanted money, ease, pleasure, idleness. Not one extenuating circumstance: it was the blood of his grandfather, crying out in him.

For several years a clique of men had been

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smuggling successfully. They had brought into the country three or four millions in rare gems. The federal authorities had spent thousands trying to find out who these men were and how they worked. Cranford's discovery of three of them and the manner in which they worked had been the result of an accident. One man purchased the gems, another man carried them to the boat, while a third did the actual smuggling. Sales of gems would be reported, the original purchaser followed and watched, and that would be the last of it. The actual smuggler Cranford laid by the heels. The other two he could not touch, as they continued to live in Paris; but he had spoiled their usefulness. From this incident he learned that they always worked in threes. The chief of this clever resolute band laid his plans, and three unknown men proceeded to execute it.

The breaking up of this trio warned the chief that the first wedge of the secret service had been driven home. If the quarry remained

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surrounded by mystery, the hunter was no less entrenched. They were reaching out in the dark for each other when Smead's accident happened. Mere guesswork had brought about the discovery of the hollow crutches. Item, Smead was doubtless the arch-smuggler; but on his side, he knew who had tripped him up. Smead could still plan, but Cranford would have to carry on the work against men wholly unknown to him; in other words, chance only would lead him from trio to trio.

Coincidence. Cranford's appearance in the jewel shop in the Rue de la Paix; his careless inquiries of the jeweler. Oh, yes; the young gentleman was a first-class customer; bought numerous jewels for the ladies of the opera; as their agent, however. He was a Frenchman. Immediately Cranford had lost interest. But while having tea at the Café de la Paix, an hour later, he had seen the young Frenchman again, in converse with an American. The jewel-case changed hands. Still, he had no

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definite suspicion; and the whole matter passed from his mind. Two days later he ran down to Cherbourg to bid some friends bon voyage. The American he had seen in the Café de la Paix was handing a package to another compatriot. The latter smiled. It was one of those inexplicable fancies, but he surrendered to it; cabled the Port of New York to be on the lookout for a portly smooth-faced man with a patch of white hair in the back of his head; to search for a necklace of sapphires. A chance shot in the dark hit the bull's-eye. The unknown, upon arriving in New York, was held up and the gems confiscated.

And now they were after him. With the note-book in their possession his days of usefulness would be at an end: a general apocalypse.

At five o'clock the rain ceased; the gale was by now brawling somewhere off the banks. The river was no longer crested. Boats were flitting to and fro, and the sullen big freight-

## A SPY

ers were drawing out from the breakwater in the basin back of the hotel. A gorgeous sunset finished the day, warm and promising good weather.

The hotel was almost deserted. It was not a summer resort. Those who sought its charm were fishermen. They sent their wives elsewhere. Cranford sat down to dinner with four other men, two of whom he knew to be retired business men who fished these waters from July to October and then hied them away to Miami for tarpon or to the Pacific for yellow-tails. Reminiscences passed back and forth. Cranford learned that the season had been exceptionally good; but that out at South Bar and Charity Shoals the sport had been the worst in years. For some reason or other the bass had turned those places over to the bane of the sportsman, old goggle-eye, piscatorially known as the rock-bass. Button Bay, over the river, had proved a find. One of the gentlemen had caught a four pounder at Homing

## PIDGIN ISLAND

Dock. Bait had been lively, and there had been plenty of it, despite the usual August blow. Cranford could not remember when he had passed a more agreeable hour.

The other two gentlemen were from down the state. They told how they split up a month's vacation into four weeks, one in June, one in July, one in August and one in September, which, if the weather behaved itself, was the finest time of the year to fish. All agreed upon this point. The small fry had by then taken themselves off; the big chaps began to bite, and they fought like demons.

Talk veered to fly-casting, which was practically impossible in these big waters on account of the eternal breeze. Some one had brought in a maskinonge from Mud Island. Lots of wall-eyed pike this year.

Apple-pie and coffee; then to the billiard-room, or off to bed. Cranford was truly happy. He would have liked nothing better than to live here the year around.



## A SPY

To you, madam, what a waste of time all this may seem! This chatter of four men at evening meal, hooks and lines and rods and reels; perfectly unintelligible. But if your man is a fisherman, shoulder a rod with him, go out into the heart of the world with him, and play with him. Eden is not so far away, if you but knew it. Hasn't some one told you that woman's happiness depends upon the boy that still lives in the heart of the workaday man? Keep that alive; go fishing with him, and let fuss and feather go hang.

At the desk Cranford found a telegram. The little Morocco note-book had been safely deposited in his safety-deposit box at the bank. He was advised to fish without worry. He strolled out to that end of the veranda where the guides foregathered. He knew them all, from the clean self-respecting man down to the dissolute and improvident.

Presently he saw Lester coming up the steps. This young guide never came to the hotel ex-

## PIDGIN ISLAND

cept on business. He was quiet, educated, a born naturalist; he could "see" bass in the water, as the saying goes. He was heartily envied by the majority of the guides because he rowed for one man, and had done so for seven years, from June seventeenth to September. He had a small boat, easy to handle, and being a natural mechanic, never tinkered with his two-cylinder engine; traveled eight miles an hour, with never a glance at the spark-plugs, which to date no machine-shop could turn out to the satisfaction of Uncle Billy.

"Where would you like to fish, sir, to-morrow?"

"We might try Pidgin."

The guide smiled. "They're biting fast at Bells' and around Horseshoe."

"We'll try those in the afternoon."

"Lunch or shore-dinner?"

"Rather believe I'd like a whack at boned bass."

"All right, sir. I'll be at the dock at seven-

## A SPY

thirty." Lester touched his hat and went down the steps.

Cranford went up to his room and began to straighten out his tackle. He whistled and hummed at the work. All boy.

Meantime a man arrived on the last train. He registered, ate a late dinner, idled about the desk and carelessly ran over the names of the guests. He then inquired the way to the telegraph office. Later, the clerk asked him if he desired a guide.

"No; I'm leaving for Kingston in the morning. If you will give me my key I'll turn in at once. The boat leaves at seven?"

"We'll call you, sir."

"Thanks," replied the stranger, who was tall, thick-set, gray-haired, ruddy-faced, with an air of prosperity.

Cranford eyed the two rods affectionately, Bristol and Leonard. Old rods, old tackle, the very leader he had fished with that last day

## PIDGIN ISLAND

over at Horseshoe, when the big fellow got away just as Uncle Billy was passing the net. A flawed hook had done the trick. In another corner of the room stood fifty dollars' worth of new tackle, glaringly new. He might not use one of them during the month, and again they might be called into active service before the week was up. He called them his "reserves."

. . . The sou'-wester, the dripping rain-coat, the oozing shoes, the strong white teeth burying themselves in the cheek of the rosy apple. Wynne; Diana Wynne, it ought to be; Diana, shut out forever from the Olympian heights, made mortal, thereby attainable. Had he met her in the hotel parlor, she would have stirred only a passing admiration. But she had come from the heart of the storm, bringing with her a gust of heady ozone. "I love it out at Pidgin. It is wild and free there. . . . I was born at sea."

He laughed a little, and whipped the rod back and forth to test its pliancy. He must

## A SPY

not permit any such nonsense to enter his head; only . . .

The next morning the late arrival of the night before changed his plans. He told the clerk that he would return at noon to Ogdensburg instead of crossing to Kingston. At breakfast he watched Cranford stealthily. When he saw him shoulder his rods and go whistling down toward the dock, he went up to his room, quietly opened the window and slipped out on to the veranda. Nonchalantly he approached Cranford's window, and finding it open, stepped inside the room. He paused to listen; tried the door gently and found it locked. He smiled. Deftly and quickly he searched through the clothes in the closet, through the luggage; nothing escaped his marvelous fingers; and when he stood up it would have taken an eye more than mortal to discover anything amiss.

Again he listened. After a minute or so he went out of the window and walked leisure-

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ly around to the north side. He was just in time to see Cranford's boat sweep out of the basin, with a twist or two of blue vapor trailing in its wake.

## CHAPTER V

### THE MYSTERIOUS MOTOR-BOAT

**W**HAT a fair world it was, cloudless, rain-washed, vistaed! Wolfe Island stood out against the pale sky of early morning, crisp, marvelously distinct. You could see the cracks in the rotting ledges, the sun-lances breaking against the sharp angles of rosy granite, the delicate lacing of pine and maple; as for the water, it was as flat and burnished as Cleopatra's mirror. Far, far above him Cranford espied a motionless speck, an eagle; and here and there the silly gulls rode and bobbed upon the river's placid bosom, as unlovely at close view as decoy-ducks, but of beauty unutterable when flying in the face of a gale. Even the midges, doubtless born that sunrise, interested him. He settled back in his comfortable chair-

## PIDGIN ISLAND

seat, pulled his gray felt hat down over his eyes, and drew contentedly at his pipe. He was very near to happiness, as near as he had any right to expect. Old shoes, run down at the heel, hopeless trousers, a coat which would have shocked the rarely shockable Warren, and a gray flannel shirt. The coat he had left with Uncle Billy two years before, and he was wearing it for luck. The comfort of it! Not another stiff collar for thirty days, excepting Sundays, when he intended to loaf or take long walks into the country. Besides, to skip a day added zest to the next day's sport.

Sunday to him was like any secular day. Travel had made him rather a godless young man; for he had seen the ten thousand sects quarreling up and down the ten thousand highways to paradise, and nobody coming back to prove anything. Only the remote villager found unalloyed pleasure in religiosity fifty-two times the year, with an added zest of ginger once in four years, when the Demo-



## THE MYSTERIOUS MOTOR-BOAT

cratic and Republican parties met upon the cloth of gold. (No intentional irony, please.)

Not that under the pie-crust of specious cynicism there wasn't a wholesome and reverent acknowledgment of God. Simply, stained windows, choirs, uninteresting sermons and unending arguments did not hold him. He did not believe in Pearly Gates nor in eternal Damnation. There was Hell enough here on earth to satisfy the justice of the most relentless God. And Heaven to his thinking was the happiest moment Here turned into eternity There. It was out in the open that he remembered the Presence, and that God was not the enemy of mankind.

Lester sat on a little oaken box-like cover which protected the engine on windy days from the vigorous onslaughts of the waves. He held the tiller-rope in his left hand and with his right scientifically thrust from time to time a battered tin dipper into the water and dribbled the contents into the bait-pail, a slen-

## PIDGIN ISLAND

der rubber tube thrown over the side serving as a drain.

Cranford had fished north, east, south and west; in virgin countries where it took ten days' portage to reach a railroad; but there was no place equal to this. It was wilderness of the most enchanting kind; not a lonely spot miles from civilization, with back-breaking portages, smudge from burning wet wood, swamp odors, mosquitoes. Wilderness from dawn till sunset only; then, all the comforts of home, clean sheets, bath-tubs, mail, trains, amusements.

"I say, Lester, suppose we take a whack just outside of Bear Point? Billy's out at Pidgin, and I don't want to swoop down on him before he gets started."

"All right, sir."

Bear Point is on the Canadian line. Lester put on a fat lively chub and Cranford made a capital cast. At heart he was as eager and as excited as he had been twenty years ago, when his father had explained the intricacies and

## THE MYSTERIOUS MOTOR-BOAT

mysteries of casting a line without having the reel back-draw.

There is, alas, only one first thrill of love, of fame, of riches; humanity can never return to these happy milestones, it can only recollect them; but a fisherman and a gambler can come back to the water and to the green baize with the same passionate thrill of the initiation. The only difference is that one makes for contentment and longevity while the other burns and kills.

“Ha!”

Cranford gave line, watched the tip of his old Leonard, and struck. He reeled in two or three feet of line, then turned and looked at Lester, who was grinning amiably.

“Can you guess what I’ve got?”

“Goo-goo-eye!”

“Compliments of the season; welcome back.”

Cranford laughed and reeled in, and the despised rock-bass came up exactly like a tin pie-plate, round and round, wabbly.

“Shall I put him in the box, sir?” asked

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Lester, as he extracted the hook. It is a superstition upheld by the majority of fishermen that if you throw away the first fish, whatever breed, you throw away your luck. Beware of thirteen, of leaving your watch under the pillow, of seeing the new-moon over the wrong shoulder (whichever that is), of singing before breakfast; all presages of evil to the fisherman.

But Cranford had no superstitions. "Lester, if you crack another joke like that, I'll skin you. I'll try one more bait." He cast again. "And don't tell Billy."

"I won't tell anybody," replied Lester, as he took up the oars again.

"You see, I bet Billy a box of cigars that we'd beat him out on the day's catch. But he ought not to take a young woman out to Pidgin this time of the year."

"Is he taking a woman out there? Well, she must want to fish there, then. Bill's married; so 'm I for that matter. When a woman says she wants to go somewhere she oughtn't

## THE MYSTERIOUS MOTOR-BOAT

to, hustle her to it; she may change her mind and turn back."

This bit of philosophy amused Cranford. There came a sharp tug and strain.

"Hooked himself!" exclaimed Cranford. He straightened the rod and waited for the "break"; but the "break" did not come. Tug-tug, at an angle of forty-five degrees. A minute went by; there was no let-up. Cranford scowled and gave the rod an impatient lift. Crack! went the tip of a ten-year rod. It slid down the taut line and disappeared into the water. "Eel!"

"I had my suspicions," said Lester gravely. A rock-bass, a broken rod and an eel did not promise well for the day's catch.

Cranford dropped the rod and pulled in the line by hand. Lester reached over at the proper moment and cut the leader. A fat eel wriggled back to his oozy environment.

"Pidgin," said Cranford disgustedly. Fisherman's luck.

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“All right; we’ll go to Pidgin; they ought to be there to-day. No telling. If Bill says she can fish, he knows. And he never takes any great risks.”

Far down the southwest lay a patch of faintest amethyst against the turquoise; this was as much of Pidgin Island as one could see from Bear Point, except when the north wind blew.

“Humming-birds, by George!” cried Cranford, as four streaks of peacock-blue whizzed past the boat, headed southward.

“Migrating. Lots of ’em in September. Flowers giving out in Canada. Couple of loon off the point, sir.”

Cranford turned and not only saw the loons but also a flock of wild geese making for the foot of Sand Bay.

“So you claim that when a woman wants to do something she oughtn’t, one should let her go her way?”

“I’m not believing that; only, it doesn’t do

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any good to argue," responded Lester, oiling up.

"When I listen to you married men, I'm glad I'm single."

"Every man ought to get married. It's no fun living on baker's bread."

Uncle Billy, noting that he was as close to the ledge as was necessary, gave a long slow pull and leaned upon his oars. She wasn't afraid of the sun; the Panama hat lay at her feet; she was getting as brown as a hazel-nut. Then it occurred to him that he had something to do. From under his seat he drew out a drawer which was full of hooks, sinkers, dilapidated leaders, spark-plugs, ancient tooth-brushes (for polishing said plugs), and other outcasts. He foraged about and presently brought forth a small tin which had aforetime contained shoe-varnish, now superseded by cold cream. This he applied to the back of his hands, up and down his nose and across the

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back of his neck. He was one of those unfortunate beings who never tanned; he burned from the opening till the closing of the season.

"Vanity, vanity, all is vanity!"

"Huh!" Uncle Billy looked up into the girl's amused eyes.

"I had no idea that you were such a dandy."

"Ain't. But," he added, hastily putting the tin away and taking up the oars, "when y' git 's old 's I am, skin ain't got nuthin' under it; it's jes' skin. An' it's goin' t' be hot t'day. Bite?"—as she suddenly turned her attention to the rod.

A bass broke hard by. He had missed his strike in his eagerness. As she turned to reel in, another struck and ran away with the bait.

"Can't book 'em when they scoot like that," declared Billy. The only diplomacy a guide knows: to soothe and convince you that it is never your fault if you miss.

"That's the fun of it. If one knew for a certainty that every bait meant a fish, there wouldn't be any sport at all. It's the eternal



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wonder of what's going on down there. That makes the third one I've lost. No matter; it's only nine. I'll have enough for shore-dinner by noon. They're biting."

"I've heard men cuss for less 'n that."

With a free-arm cast, the fresh bait struck the water easily thirty feet away. When she felt the sinker touch bottom, she brought in the line till she was sure the lead swung in the current. She was rewarded almost instantly; and then the sport began. She landed six in less than thirty minutes, all under two pounds, tender eating.

"We got him beat," commented Billy joyfully. "He won't have no sech luck, first day."

"What him?"

"Mr. Cranford. I bet fifty apples t' fifty cigars that you'd beat him on th' day's catch."

She frowned. And the frown disturbed him. When she brought in her first rock-bass, he slammed it viciously to the bottom of the boat.

"Them goggle-eyes; hate 'em. Look jes'

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like th' feller that owes me money. Guess that's Lester comin'."

After all, she had no right to be angry. Such a wager was perfectly harmless. To outfish a famous angler suddenly appealed to her; and he was famous up here; every man, woman and child knew him. He was forever buying candies for the children, or sending them to the circus, or taking them on Sunday trips through the islands below; and many a woman whose husband was a shiftless ne'er-do-well had him to thank for kindly benefactions. All this Uncle Billy had told her. He was a rich man's son, didn't have to work, divided his time between Europe and the lake, just a pleasant idler; so spoke the village. If Mr. Cranford could keep a secret, so could she.

Cranford swung his hat boyishly in greeting, and she waved her hand.

"What luck?" he inquired, when Lester drew within speaking distance.

"Six. They're biting freely."

## THE MYSTERIOUS MOTOR-BOAT

“Fine! I see that I must get to work. Uncle Billy tells me that you’re a great angler, and I’ve got a crown to hang on to.”

He threw off his coat. His sleeves were rolled above his elbows. There was nothing effeminate in those forearms nor in the set and thickness of the shoulders. She found herself eager to see how he worked. He began casting with a single-piece Leonard, the mate to the one he had broken over at Bear Point. An hour passed, with but one strike to his credit. That was like Pidgin. A dozen boats might drift up and down; generally, only one made the catch. Noon came.

“We’ll have dinner in Sand Bay, where it’s shady.”

“We’ll dine on Pidgin.”

Uncle Billy rubbed his hands tenderly. “It’ll be blazin’ hot.”

“I have decided.”

Pidgin Island, without shade; spider nets filled with the skeletons of millions and mil-

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lions of eel-flies. He sighed. This young woman was certainly mad over the "old stove-lid," his pet term for the island. Well, she was paying six dollars the day; it was up to her to say where she wanted to go. Why, there weren't two shore-dinners the year on Pidgin. And there was Cranford; he'd hie for the north side of Sand Bay where there was a grove of pines, cool and inviting.

"All right, Miss Wynne. They'll be 'nough driftwood fer th' stove. We've got seven. Mr. Cranford's got on'y one, 's far 's I can see."

"Only one?" She did not know whether she was glad or sorry. She did know, however, that the true sportsman needs only a small margin, that victory close won is always more gratifying than complete rout of the enemy. "Perhaps I'd better offer him two of these?"

"Rub it in, huh?"

"I did not make any wager, and I heartily wish you'd lost your fifty apples. We might as well go in to dinner now."

## THE MYSTERIOUS MOTOR-BOAT

They had not proceeded ten yards before the other boat began to kick up astern.

"Wait!" she ordered.

Uncle Billy shut off power. What in tarnation was she going to do now? Tell Cranford he couldn't have shore-dinner on Pidgin?

She was a girl of whims, spurs of the moment; yet behind these whims lay a directness of purpose, an insight as to what she wanted at this or that particular moment, that was singularly like deliberation. Since she and this man might at any moment clash, why not share her fish with him and make him talk about himself? So she hailed Cranford.

"How many?"

"Only one."

"I shall be glad to divide my catch with you."

"That's fine, I'm sure. I haven't tasted fresh bass in nearly two years. Are you having dinner on the island? I can very well go over to Sand Bay."

She smiled in ready understanding. Since

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she had asked him to share her fish, she could not very well ask him to go elsewhere to eat them. "You are welcome to one end of my table."

And that was enough for any man.

Landing was shortly made at the dock, and the four of them prowled about for driftwood.

"What's she want dinner here for?" asked Lester, as he stacked his portable stove and stuffed newspapers into it. "It's a baker's oven here to-day. It's too flat for real fishing. What's she want to eat here for?"

"Search me," answered Uncle Billy, mopping his forehead. "We don't haff t' light no fire t' fry th' fish. Jes' lay 'em down anywhere. There they go, up th' light. Probably be wantin' t' bury more birds. But she's some fisherman."

"She can fish. I've been watching her."

When Lester and Uncle Billy agreed upon anything it was something palpable to all eyes.

## THE MYSTERIOUS MOTOR-BOAT

“Beautiful, beautiful!” murmured the girl.

“But very, very hot. You should have gone over to Sand Bay. Dozens of cool and shady places. I hope you don’t think I’m presuming upon Uncle Billy’s novel introduction, Miss Wynne. But up here there’s a camaraderie one doesn’t find in the city.”

“Isn’t he funny? I’ve had guides and guides, but never a one like him. His house is like a zoological museum; mounted fish and bird, the one ready to break and the other to fly. Why do they call him Uncle Billy?”

“I gave him that name when I was a boy. My father said it wasn’t proper for a boy to call an old chap Bill; so I tacked on the uncle, and it has stayed with him ever since.”

“The village seems to have adopted you. See! Isn’t the island sprawled out like a huge starfish? Wild, wild! I love it. What cramped lives we mortals live, in spite of all this alluring open! Are there many anglers at the hotel?”

## PIDGIN ISLAND

“Only four besides myself; two old chaps I’ve known for years and two more from a near-by town. The season, as they call it, is over; but we wise fellows know that September is the most glorious month of all.”

“I have fished mostly in Maine. I am used to the fly; but it is impossible up here.”

Down below they could see the two guides puttering about. Presently they stepped to the water’s edge and began to clean the fish. All this was so different from the camps she had known.

“There’s a power-boat heading for the island.”

“Where?” she cried, clutching him by the arm.

Cranford found a blue spot on his arm that night. “Coming over from Horseshoe. Canopied-top; mile away, I should say.”

The girl’s eyes closed and she swayed against the outer rail.



## THE MYSTERIOUS MOTOR-BOAT

“Why, Miss Wynne, what is the matter? Are you faint?”

“It *is* warm up here,” she said, with a wan smile. “Let us go down. I am really dizzy.”

## CHAPTER VI

### ANOTHER DILEMMA—WOMAN

C RANFORD followed her down the narrow winding staircase. Her dizziness was evidently transitory, for she almost flew down, and he in his turn grew dizzy trying to keep her in view. He was puzzled. Hot up there in the light it undoubtedly was, but the real hurt came from the reflected brilliancy of the sun on the water, and she had fished closer to it all morning. There had been no signs of dizziness then. Perhaps, after all, she had not eaten anything for breakfast, womanlike, and it was hunger. It never occurred to him that the sight of the canopied-top had thrown her off her balance. Up here he never suspected anybody, unless it was the man who lost a four pounder over at Homing Dock and

## ANOTHER DILEMMA—WOMAN

bragged about it. His mind was as clear as a boy's. The craft which made him formidable in his peculiar work lay fallow. He was an angler, nothing more. So he decided that her dizziness was due to hunger, and went to see that the machinery which would assuage it was set going.

He proceeded at once to the stove, putting in a suggestion here, a hint there. He opened the olives and anchovies and split the two cantaloupes, packing them neatly with ice and covering them with a napkin. Then he set the table in the shadow of the tower, which made a first-class sun-dial, too. The shadow would last in that spot at least an hour; and if lunch went beyond that time (which he hoped it would), it would be simple to follow the shadow.

The pork was sizzling in the frying-pan, the green corn bubbling in the pot, and the odor of coffee drifted up invitingly. A meal fit for the gods, better than all the Ritz-Carltons put

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together could offer. Presently he looked about for the girl, and saw her standing at the end of the dock. The power-boat was only a few yards off.

Suddenly Uncle Billy and Lester set off lickity-cut toward their boats, and Cranford jogged along behind them.

“What’s up?” he called.

“Game wardens!”

Neither of the guides had a guilty conscience this day, but it was always well to be on hand when the wardens took inventory of your belongings. Some people weren’t above taking all the bass they could catch, notwithstanding that the Canadian law permitted eight bass to the rod.

There is all the difference in the world between the American and Canadian game wardens. On the south side of the line, laws, bristling with amendments and ramifications and additional clauses, were passed and printed in books and then put away on the shelf for

## ANOTHER DILEMMA—WOMAN

reference only, since nobody honestly intended to obey them. Perhaps at odd times the sheriff and the wardens would get their heads together and stop a baseball game on Sunday, or interfere with a fishing trip of a few poor chaps who couldn't get away on week-days. It was all very much like wet fire-crackers; here and there one fizzled or exploded flatly. But on the north side a law was a law, seven days in the week, and those living in the radius of its effect had the decency to respect and obey it. They very well had to.

If you fished in Canadian waters without a license and were caught, you paid, whether you were ignorant of the law or knowing. The wardens swooped down upon you when you least expected them. The fact that the warden might be a friend of an intimate friend of a member of Parliament had nothing to do with his job. In the Land of the Free and the Brave methods were different.

And a Canadian game warden likes to get to

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a fishing-boat before its owner. Lester and Uncle Billy arrived to find their boats being overhauled, the fish-boxes, the hollows under stern and bow. Friendly greetings were exchanged. The men knew one another; there was no animus on either side; it was all in a day's work.

"Only the game wardens," said the girl, smiling at Cranford.

Only. His puzzlement revived.

"Are you hungry?"

"Is everything ready? I'm starved!" She turned and ran up the dock toward the white patch in the shadow of the lighthouse.

The trifling inquisition over, the canopied-top put out again, heading for Sand Bay.

"Them fish'll be burnt!" roared Uncle Billy, shuffling along the dock. "She won't know nothin' 'bout turnin' them."

When they arrived, however, they found her daintily turning the fish in the pan. Cranford

## ANOTHER DILEMMA—WOMAN

was conscious of a little catch in his breath. The round brown arms, the sleeves turned carelessly to the elbow, the collar loose at the throat, the flesh pearl-tinted in the shadow of her chin, the cheeks red under the tan: a woman, lithe and strong and fearless and beautiful, a proper mate for a man. He did not mean it so, but there was something compelling in his gaze; and her eyes turned toward his. Instantly there was a smile, friendly, warm like an honest handclasp, at the same time as bewildering and dazzling as sun-glitter on water. He had all he could do to keep from drawing his hand across his eyes, so strong was the illusion that he had momentarily been blinded. Then the smile broke into sound, subtle and alluring as that which Ulysses might have heard as he struggled at the mast.

He interpreted the laughter far more readily than the smile. It was mischievous. The expression on his face had been that of a yokel,

## PIDGIN ISLAND

no doubt. Worldly-wise, versed in femininity, he realized that it would never do to give her this advantage.

"Thanks for the smile. But why did you laugh at me?"

"Has no woman ever smiled at you before?"—as she turned the handle of the frying-pan into Uncle Billy's horny palm.

"Not quite like that."

"Mercy! was it so dreadful?"

"No. On the contrary, it was as unexpected as it was beautiful."

She looked straight into his eyes as she retorted: "Parlor broken. I am greatly disappointed. Can't you men forget those insufferable frostings when you are out in the open?"

"Back there,"—with a nod toward the south,—“back there I shouldn't have forgotten to smile."

"Grub!" came disenchantingly from Uncle Billy.

The girl laughed again. And Cranford



## ANOTHER DILEMMA—WOMAN

laughed too; and he knew that she knew why. She had won all points in the comedy.

They sat down, he at one end of the table and she at the other. And they ate a feast for the gods, who very well knew how to eat: the finest fish in the world, tender green corn, nectarous coffee, crisp potatoes, luscious melons, and the sun and the air for seasoning.

“It was very kind of you to share these fish. If you only knew how I have longed for the taste of one! I wonder what it really is that makes food taste so good out-of-doors?”—curious to learn what opinion she might advance; for he had had but little contact with women free of their fashionable environments, and only imagined what they might be outside their fortress of repression and observance of iron-bound conventionalities.

“Attitude of the mind,” she answered, as she dug into the green rind of the melon. “The return to the simples, the shedding of complexities; early to bed and early to rise, and all

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the sordid ugly things left behind. We wash our bodies every day, but only when we get out like this do we wash our souls."

He became just the least bit afraid that she would prove to be that bluestocking Minerva, for Diana never bothered her head about the care of souls. Diana.

"I have a curious idea that perhaps you are called Diana."

The spoon poised a moment. "Yes, that is my name. But do not confuse me with the mythological goddess, please; I am mortal, very mortal indeed."

"Pardon me. I did not mean to be impertinent."

"It is as I said. We return to simples. What is more direct, what is simpler, than asking me my given name? I almost said Christian! And I am just as much a pagan as my name implies. Your name is John. Uncle Billy has been singing your praises since the first day we went out. I was beginning to hate you. The green corn and the melons

## ANOTHER DILEMMA—WOMAN

were delicious. Thanks. I am as much in your debt as you are in mine. And there you have the truth of it. Friendship should always balance evenly. Weigh obligation against obligation. Or, better still, see that there are no obligations. Old and trite as the hills, isn't it?"

"May I be counted as a friend?" he asked eagerly.

She rose, spun the melon rind into the water, stooped quickly and cast a stone after it, with amazing accuracy. "Why not—up here? If we ever meet elsewhere it will be from behind hedges, and we'll have to play the game—silly, I think it—of having some one introduce us properly." Another stone flew out and caught the melon on the rim, spinning it. It overbalanced and sank. "What made you ask me if my name was Diana?"

"That,"—readily, pointing to the spot where the melon had been floating. "Who but Diana could have thrown a stone like that?"

"Not a very brilliant invention."

## PIDGIN ISLAND

There was in her glance neither embarrassment nor coquetry nor curiosity, nothing that he recognized as feminine; yet it seemed to draw the truth out of him as easily as the bucket comes up from the well.

“When you came into the boat-house, Diana sprung into my mind. The imperturbability—”

“Ah!”—mockingly.

“—with which you accepted the atmospheric conditions—”

“Fiddle-dee-dee!”

“—struck me as being unlike anything I had ever before seen in woman.”

“I like the way you finished that sentence. It shows tenacity of purpose. Am I a freak?”

“No.” He held his hand toward her.

“All this is very unusual,” she said, eying the hand musingly but making no effort to take it.

“Everything is unusual these days. Very little is natural. We put clothes over everything, even our thoughts.”

## ANOTHER DILEMMA—WOMAN

“I despise sentimental people.”

“A proper spirit for one called Diana. For my part, I’ve never had the time to be sentimental. Is there anything the matter with my hand?”

Gravely she extended her own. He found the clasp strong and warm; a large hand, but beautifully shaped.

“Up here,” she said. “I may take it into my head to ignore you utterly if we should meet in any other place.” She withdrew her hand slowly. “And now, suppose we explore the oven, as Uncle Billy calls the island? The two will be wanting to eat.”

“All right, Lester!” he called.

Then they proceeded to scramble over boulders, through the scrawny brush, to the other end of the island. Once or twice he experienced a tingle of superstition. The Huntress herself could not have moved with more lightness and surety. Supposing—he laughed aloud. And she paused, turned and eyed him questioningly.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

"I was wondering if there is such a thing as reincarnation—of goddesses."

"Fudge! I have always lived out in the open. I hate cities. I don't like the human pack nor their habitations. The more I see of people, the more I despise them."

Bitterness. What had the human pack done to her? And then recurred to him her perturbation over the arrival of the canopied-top. Only the game wardens. What, then had she expected?

After a while they sat down on a boulder of pink granite. A slight ripple, promising nothing, stirred the water; a limping breeze, too enervated to travel more than a hundred yards at a time.

"We'll have some sport if the wind will blow a little."

She rested her chin in her palms and stared north.

"Do you hunt?" he asked.

She nodded.

## 'ANOTHER DILEMMA—WOMAN

"Duck?"

"Duck, caribou, moose, bear."

"Somehow I rather believed you did. Will you sit here just a moment?" He rose and ran back to the boats. When he returned he found her grubbing among the little crannies in the rocks and boulders. He held in his hands an automatic and three tin-cans. "Here," he said; "try your hand at it." He tossed a can far out into the water.

She shot offhand and sent the can skittering.

"By George! you *can* shoot."

"Throw one into the air."

The jerk of the can in mid-air told him that she had hit it on the wing.

"You're the best shot I ever saw!"—admiringly. "Monday we'll go out for duck. I have two good guns."

"I have mine."

"Splendid!"

And then they found that they had hunted

## PIDGIN ISLAND

moose and caribou in the same provinces ; knew the same guides. Adroitly they plied each other with questions—and learned nothing beyond the fact that they both called New York home. It put into the heart of each the notion that the other was strangely reticent about every-day affairs. She knew the reason for his evasions, but he could not fathom hers. All the same, their love of the open brought them together closer than anything else could have done.

Once, while he idly tossed pebbles into the water, she scrutinized him appraisingly. She saw a clean-cut face, a finely shaped head, a healthy body : the kind of a man she had always been looking for and always missing somehow. Dissipation had not set its mark upon him ; there were no lines about his eyes or mouth. A sigh, inaudible, escaped her. Could he possibly become a comrade ? A second sigh, audible this time, but he did not hear it. How well she knew that between man and woman real



## ANOTHER DILEMMA—WOMAN

camaraderie came only after marriage. To her, marriage— She stood up.

“ They are carrying the tables back to the boats.”

“ Pretty hot yet.”

“ Devil and the deep blue sea. It's just as hot here as out there on the water, and the hope of catching a whopper alleviates one some. Come, make Uncle Billy pay you those fifty apples, and I'll help you eat them.”

“ I'll do the best I know how. But the day began wrong. Broke a famous rod on an eel the first thing this morning.”

“ Sorry.”

“ How long do you expect to remain here? ”

“ The length of a whim. I may stay a fortnight more. I may take the train to-morrow night.”

“ Surely not till we've potted a duck or two! ”

“ I'll think it over.”

It was long after four when they reeled in.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

Not a single bass all that afternoon: which was like old Pidgin, where you got a boxful of golliwhoppers one day and nothing the next.

As Uncle Billy turned in toward the farm, Cranford called over his shoulder: "Some day when it rains I'm coming out."

"All right,"—with a wave of her hand.

For a moment the sun rested upon her face and hair. Diana. Odd that he should have guessed it. She was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen in all his days: and the most mysterious. Who was she? What was she? A woman of the world, surely; for she possessed all the fearlessness and poise of one who knew what she was about. Wynne. No; the name suggested nothing, recalled nothing. He hoped she would stay the fortnight. He did not try to analyze his high spirits, his elation. It was not yet time for that process.

After dinner the girl walked down from the farmhouse to the dock and stood there watching the flash-flash, flash-flash of the light away

## ANOTHER DILEMMA—WOMAN

out at Pidgin. What day would they come?  
How long had she to wait? Ah, was there in  
this wide world one so unhappy as she?

## CHAPTER VII

### A CHIP OF THE OLD BLOCK

C RANFORD'S boat was about twenty feet beyond the girl's. Suddenly she saw him strike, and right from under Uncle Billy's port oar leaped the big fellow. The surprised girl started back, and to save herself from going overboard, dropped her rod. Fortunately it struck the gunwale evenly and balanced. She pounced upon it, laughing.

"I couldn't have acted any sillier if some one had shouted—*mouse!*"

"Jee-*hossi-phat!*" murmured Uncle Billy, as the bass cleared the water again. He made a megaphone of his hands and shouted to Cranford: "It's *him!*"

Cranford sent back a happy laugh. The girl watched him, fascinated. He did not seem to care one way or the other, whether he lost the

## A CHIP OF THE OLD BLOCK

fish or brought him aboard. Once the bass turned a complete circle around the boat, and to this maneuver Cranford danced a hornpipe from stern to bow and back again, with Lester ducking madly and shifting this oar and that. Everybody was laughing excitedly and offering advice. Uncle Billy stood up and shouted, and the girl, her hands clenched, murmured "ahs!" and "ohs!" after the manner of children witnessing fireworks.

Once, the black fellow decided to test the strength of the line by tangling it up in the screw. My, what a time! Cranford immediately called for help. Lester crept forward, straddled the stern and deftly worked out the snarl. Not an inch of slack did Mr. Bass get for his cunning. A glorious battle, a superb contest; skill and intellect at one end, fear and strength and cunning at the other, the connecting link, a barely visible thread of silk. It was fourteen minutes by the girl's watch when Cranford called for the net.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

The girl's palms were wet and little beads of perspiration stood out upon her forehead. She had gone through the battle as if she herself had fought every turn and phase of it.

"Hi, Miss Wynne, reel's buzzin'!" sang out Uncle Billy, diving for the oars. "Mebbe it's th' mate. They run in pairs."

She caught up the rod just as the final turn of the reel brought the slip-knot into view; fifty yards of line out! One chance in a hundred! She thrust the rod outward and took three or four turns of the reel. Dared she strike? Away beyond Cranford's boat the fish broke. Lester, realizing what had happened, came about and headed for the shore, to give the girl all the play she needed.

"Mate to ours," he said to Cranford.

"A golliwhopper!" gurgled Uncle Billy. "Don't y' git fussed, Miss Wynne. He's swallered th' hook, 'r I don't know nuthin' 'bout bass."

"Uncle Billy, I shall cry if I lose him!"

## A CHIP OF THE OLD BLOCK

“Took th’ bait off ’n th’ bottom! What d’ y’ know ’bout that? An’ don’t this knock ol’ Pidgin galley-west? Huh?”

“There he breaks again!”

Lester weighed Cranford’s catch and laid it tenderly in the box so as not to injure the fins. A mighty thumping followed. Here was a fish worth mounting. “Four and three-quarters.”

But Cranford did not hear him. He was watching the girl, the girl of his idle dreams, the girl he had always known to be somewhere among the millions, mate for him, helpmeet in sorrow, comrade in joy, wife. Young and strong and brave; scarlet-lipped, brown-eyed, lithe. Till this spectacular moment he had not known; but now he knew that when she had entered Uncle Billy’s boat-house that stormy morning, but ten days ago, she had also entered his life, never to go out of it. Diana. Who she really was did not matter. Where she had come from, still less. He loved her.

Day after day the perfect September weather

## PIDGIN ISLAND

had held; day after day they had fished and hunted and eaten shore-dinner together; and day after day some new charm, some fresh angle of beauty, had been disclosed to him. Romance!

“I can’t budge him!” she panted.

“Sulkin’. Jes’ wait a minute. He ain’t begun t’ fight yet. Mebbe th’ hook hurts. Snub ’im.”

Snubbing, however, did no good. Presently the fish concluded that he could possibly get rid of the torment by dashing in the direction from which it seemed to emanate. A mile a minute. No reel on earth could have met and held such a rush from such a fish; so she stripped the line frantically. She choked back the hysterical sobs which caught at her throat. Never had she known a bass so strong. Between Horse-shoe and Wolfe Islands runs a gut, nine or ten feet deep. The bass kept to this. He came toward the boat, passed it, and continued straight on, toward Kingston, some four miles



## A CHIP OF THE OLD BLOCK

away, no stop-over, evidently; his destination was Kingston. The line began to sing again, and the girl's fingers stung. Time after time she snubbed, and again and again the twang of the line warned her. Instantly the hysterical phase of her excitement died away. She mustn't lose her head.

"Hold him now!" shouted Cranford, more excited than he had ever been before. "Make him fight you. Don't let him run again—ah!"

The tiger broke, shaking the line savagely and twisting in mid-air. Four times he clove the water; and then he began to come in on his nose, as they say, fighting wildly every inch of the way, for life and liberty, mayhap for his wife and family, for he is the only fresh-water fish who has a family and who protects his young valiantly, even ferociously; no scoundrelly cannibal like the brook-trout.

The girl's throat ached, her eyes, her arms. When the fish turned over on his side she put the net under him; but she had not the power

## PIDGIN ISLAND

to lift him into the boat. Uncle Billy had to bring him in, and he proceeded to do so, with a "ha-ha!" and a "ho-ho!" and a "What d' y' know 'bout that?"

"Oh!" murmured the girl, closing her eyes for a moment.

"Well done!" cried the happy Cranford. "It's half after twelve; time for lunch."

Uncle Billy hauled out his drawer-seat and pawed about for the scales. The great black fellow heaved to and fro on the hook.

"Great Jee-hossi-phat! Five pound, two ounces!" he announced.

"Splendid!"

"I'll mount 'em both," declared Uncle Billy. "An' mebbe th' boys back at th' village won't squint some when they sees 'em! Oh, my!"

In the very center of Horseshoe Island there lies a circular shallow pond, with the inlet at the head. Out of the magic channel the two boats flew, skirting the island and presently entering the haven: pines and maples and a

## A CHIP OF THE OLD BLOCK

beautifully pebbled beach, upon which the victors were landed. And what was more natural than that they should ask to see the fish placed side by side?

"A great world, isn't it?" said Cranford, holding out his hand.

"Sometimes," she answered. She accepted the handclasp, but she avoided his eyes. Why?

"I've fished twenty years up here, but I never saw two bass like that in one day."

"Brave!" She was sorry now.

"Ner me neither," put in Uncle Billy. "I never see a bass fight harder 'r longer. She's got yourn, Mr. Cranford; th' one y' lost two year ago. I thought at first you'd hooked 'im. But *that's* him."

She knelt and spread out the still quivering fins. "Aren't they beautiful?"

"Beautiful indeed."

Something in the tone caused her to look up quickly. Immediately her gaze returned to the fish, troubled. No; that must not be; never,

## PIDGIN ISLAND

never. She had in mind to go away with the memory of the one clean-souled man she had ever known; a merry comrade who recognized the barrier of her loneliness, who never presumed upon the ease with which she had whimsically accorded him her friendship. But now! She had seen that look in other men's eyes; then it had set a burning in her cheeks, stirred an anger in her heart; now there was neither the one nor the other, only an imperceptible fading of the tan and a vague apprehension of misery to come. That night she determined to disillusion him; she would tell him the galling truth. She was not the mate for such a man as he.

In these glorious ten days she had learned that he had left all work behind; that he knew nothing; that all she had to fear from him was that look in his eyes.

"I have a plan," he said, subconsciously recognizing a danger. "I'll tell you what. It will be like flying in the face of providence to

## A CHIP OF THE OLD BLOCK

fish any more to-day. After lunch we'll take a jaunt over to Kingston and prow! about for melons. We can come back by the way of the canal and pot a duck, maybe a meal or two."

"Kingston?" She sprang up, animated, the vital reason for her being here at all coming to life again. "Good! I've been wanting to see the quaint old town. How long will it take us?"

"Half an hour."

"And can I bring back a pair of shoe-strings?"

"Surely, Uncle Sam will not mind that."

Cranford laughed; then grew sober. What would she say when she learned his despicable business? Very soon he would have to tell her: would have to tell her for the simple reason that a man ought to have no secrets from the woman who is to be his wife. A great flame seemed burning in his heart (primordial, had he but known it) to fend off the world from her, to battle for her, to conquer some-

## PIDGIN ISLAND

thing for her. Diana Wynne. It might or might not be her name. No matter. He had his own name, and he could give her that. And the marvel of it all was, ten days ago he had not known of her existence.

Oddly enough, the moment a man falls in love with a woman, the battalions of Doubt storm the fortress; they cross the moats, scale the bastions, the scarps, enter everywhere. What if she proved to be some money-prince's daughter? He knew something of the flinty hearts of that breed of fathers: money must mate money, if not that, nothing less than a title. Perhaps she had run away to avoid something of this sort. Perhaps—Doddering and doubting never got one anywhere. That night he would go out to the farm, and frankly, without hem or haw, ask her to be his wife, and let the world go hang.

After lunch Lester carefully wrapped the big fish in the napkins, piled the excess luggage

## A CHIP OF THE OLD BLOCK

into his boat, and with a cheerful wave of his hat, set off for home. Billy's boat was larger. Cranford sat with his back to the old guide and never looked at anything but the girl's exquisite face; talked without being able later to recollect one word of the conversation, heard the sound of his voice detachedly, as if it belonged to some one else.

"This one day," thought she, "I'm going to forget everything and just be happy."

"And a fortnight ago I didn't know her!" thought he.

At quarter to three the *Navarre* bumped into the jetty, and the two young people jumped ashore.

"We shan't be gone more than an hour, Billy," said Cranford. "Get a crate of melons, if you can find any good ones. Got any money?"

"'Nough for a crate o' mushmelons. Don't go buyin' no new tackle, though." Uncle Billy

## PIDGIN ISLAND

grinned. "Nuthin' but two-cent lines here. You're always exper'mentin' when y' come t' Kingston."

"Not to-day;" and Cranford laughed. He and Miss Wynne proceeded up the main street.

"Ain't they a pair?" murmured the guide, addressing his mudhook, which he cast to windward to prevent the boat from banging her ribs against the jetty, should a breeze come up during his absence. "No fuss 'n' feathers, no nonsense 'bout etticut; jes' two human bein's, nachel 's th' Lord 'ntended 'em t' be. Wonder 'f she'll fish up here next year?" He wiped his hands on his jeans and started out to hunt for the late cantaloupes.

"How quiet these inland towns are! People go about easily; no rush, no hurry, as if some one was always trying to get somewhere before some one else. Some day I'm going to bury myself in a small village and never go away again." The girl indicated with a gesture of her hand the comparatively deserted streets.



## A CHIP OF THE OLD BLOCK

"How about winter?" Cranford glanced at the bloomy cheek so near his shoulder.

"I shouldn't mind the snow and the cold, so long as I was contented."

"But would you be, after all the noise and color of the world?"

She smiled. "Are noise and color worth while?"

"That depends upon the state of your mind. I'll admit that noise isn't necessary; but color! It's in everything, animate and inanimate, rocks, water, sky, trees. There's color in smiles and tears, in laughter. Color is light and life."

"Do you write poetry?" It was the first direct personal question she had yet asked him, even in jest.

"There are times when I think it."

She found it necessary to turn her glance toward the nearest window: and immediately she shouted with laughter. The window was pyramided with whisky bottles.

"Is it as funny as all that?"—moodily.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

"No, Mr. Cranford; but you have a disconcerting way of looking at me, and I sought for help in the nearest window—with that result!"

While he joined her laughter honestly enough, he was quite aware of the fact that she had side-tracked his burst of sentimentality, very adroitly, too. He stopped abruptly, his gaze leveled across the street.

She stole a shy glance at him, and noted the sudden tenseness of his shoulders, the truculent uplift of his chin. All the boyishness had disappeared; it was the face of a man, a fighting man.

"What is it?"

"A man I think I know; just entered the hotel over the way. Will you please stand here for a moment? I wouldn't miss seeing him for anything in this world,"—grimly.

"Go, by all means. You will find me in the book-shop, next door here."

Cranford ran swiftly to the hotel and rushed

## A CHIP OF THE OLD BLOCK

into the lobby. He looked about rapidly. The man was nowhere in sight. From the lobby he hurried into the bar. It was deserted except for the listless bartender, who was in the act of tucking a bill into his waistcoat pocket.

"I say," began Cranford, rather breathlessly, "did you just now see a big man in gray flannels? Limps badly; carries a cane? Old friend of mine."

"No, sir. Nobody like that hereabouts."

Cranford sought the billiard-room, to find only a sleepy attendant. He returned to the lobby and ran over the register. No illumination there. Yet, he could have sworn upon the accuracy of his eyes. He had seen Smead rise from the veranda chair and hobble into the hotel. And what was Smead doing up here? He paused irresolutely. He was so amazed at his discovery that he forgot to look about again. Had he thought to scrutinize the faces of the loungers he would have seen a pair of astonishingly handsome brown eyes peering satirically

## PIDGIN ISLAND

over the top of a newspaper. Thus, he missed a point in the game. He never forgot a description, and Warren never missed the salient details of a man's face. He swung on his heel and made for the book-shop. Smead. He was sure of it.

The owner of the dark eyes stroked a scarred chin, rose and strolled into the bar from behind which a big man in gray flannels was just emerging, his face writhed in a grimace of pain.

"Old friend of mine, eh? Oh, there you are, Don. Where'd the fool go?"

"Book-shop over the way. You get up to your room. I told you how it would be if you came up here."

Smead limped out to the elevator, and the two of them went up to the former's room.

"You've done it, all right. He would have been as blind as an owl. He was just peacefully fishing; and now the sight of you has put a bee in his bonnet. This isn't the kind of a health-resort for your style, and he'll realize it,

## A CHIP OF THE OLD BLOCK

and watch and pry and nose about till he stumbles upon something. I'm going over on to-morrow's boat with Fagin."

"There was a woman with him," rumbled Smead.

"Did you see her face?"

"No. What are you going to do with Fagin?"

"Put Cranford where he will not bother any one. Oh, I shan't hurt him; just hide him till we are out of the way. I told you at the start that so long as he saw no familiar face, he wouldn't suspect anything. I told you to stay in New York."

"Who's running this affair?"

"I am," answered the other curtly. "I'm not going to sit still and see you make a hash of the game. Oh, I get your view. You don't trust your dutiful son. No more do I trust you. But this is my game, and I'm going to play it out my way. Don't leave the room till after dinner. He'll be gone by that time."

A rumble from Smead.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

“Don’t waste your breath, papa. When this deal is off the board, we’ll split and go our ways. All you are really good for is bamboozling the chaps who come into your roulette rooms. Stick to that. You’re a marked man now.”

“You’re an insolent puppy!”

“Chip of the old block. Now, I’m going to keep an eye on him till he gets into his motor-boat. I want to make sure that he gets away.”

Later, he saw Cranford and the girl come out of the book-shop. He tried to get a glimpse of her face, but Cranford’s shoulders obscured her. So, patiently he idled down the street after them, pausing in a doorway whenever they stopped before a window; on, to the waterfront. As Cranford gave the girl his hand to the boat, the young man with the scarred chin saw her face in full. Clever as he was, alert always, watchful, iron-nerved, the unexpected sight of that face shocked him into uttering an ejaculation. The girl turned her head. Their eyes met.

## A CHIP OF THE OLD BLOCK

"What's the matter?" asked Cranford, as she lay back weakly and closed her eyes.

"I am very tired. Did you find your friend?"

"I must have been mistaken," he answered diffidently. "I'll wager that old golliwhopper was too much for you. Wasn't it a superb fight, though? May I come over after dinner to-night?"

"Do come," she said.

"All right, Billy. Half past four. Can we make the canal?"

"Water's good; we can git back quicker th' way we came."

"The quickest way home," said the girl.

As for the young man on the jetty, he turned and walked slowly away. A thousand recollections rose vividly in his mind, crowding one another in their appeal; and briefly the dormant good in him stirred into life: youth, the right road and the wrong, flashes of happiness—He shrugged. Since one couldn't go back, why

## PIDGIN ISLAND

*look* back? He laughed, as laughs the beggar who has been spurned.

"I'll go up and tell the old man. It will make a sponge out of his heart."

The news did. But the face gave no sign.

"Do you hate your father like that?"—curiously.

"Have you ever done anything to make anybody love you? Look back; rake up a single item. You can't. You thought it fine sport to teach the green lad all the rottenness you knew. You taught him your spurious ethics: nothing was wrong till you were found out. Well, your pupil is at the head of his class, if that will give you gratification. There might have been the right stuff in me, but you stamped it out. God knows! Hate you? Hanged if I know. You're worth a quarter of a million. Why don't you cut it all out and start anew somewhere? I know the reason. You can't. Well, no more can I. A precious pair of black-legs!"



## A CHIP OF THE OLD BLOCK

Smead gave a shake of his lion-like head. Weakness before this boy was bad policy. The only thing in the world that could twist his heart: well, it had been twisted, and that was the end of it. "Get out of the room, you sniveler. What if I did teach you the game? A man with a spine could have quit at any time."

"Spine? Thanks. I'll tonic that up."

The door slammed.

## CHAPTER VIII

NO

**F**OUR elderly dames, three of whom sat primly in the cane-bottomed chairs: the fourth, shielding her face with her apron, knelt before the oven and drew out from the withering blast of heat four brown loaves of "salt-risings." Then she set the loaves upside down on the deal table, and wiped her perspiring face. A trite picture, hill-old; in nearly every art-gallery in the world you will see it, and few artists have ever had the courage to name it anything harsher than *Gossip*. Nothing good ever emanates from these afternoon quartets; the trail of the serpent is over it all; you will find a trail of Borgia pasties, too, beautifully frosted outside and wonderfully poisoned within, slow poison. Mercy! they don't mean any

## NO

harm; they wouldn't hurt a fly,—so they say when confronted with some of their irreparable damage. The devil finds a plenty for idle hands to do; but his main business is the culture of idle tongues and from the very bottom of his soul—pardon the anachronism!—he loathes the deaf and dumb.

In a country village the first topic for gossip is the behavior of the rival parson's wife; then perhaps the little milliner, the little dressmaker; and finally any new arrival who minds his or her own business. An uncommunicative person is always an object of suspicion; they have something to conceal; or, if one talks and talks and talks, it's an effort to throw one off the track. No hope.

So these four had discussed and dissected the rival parson's wife, the goings-on of the milliner and the dressmaker, and so on, down to the strange, aloof young woman who was staying out at the farm.

“She's one o' them actresses.”

## PIDGIN ISLAND

“An’ the airs they put on ’mong decent folks!”

“Why, Bill hasn’t said anythin’ about her bein’ an actress,” mildly protested Uncle Billy’s wife, mindful of the six dollars the day.

“That’s like a man; allus blind ’s a bat.”

“She seems nice spoken.”

“It’s their business to be. Actresses are th’ only womin who go gaddin’ about without their husbands, who’re allus gittin’ divorced. You never see a newspaper without readin’ somethin’ about their goin’s-on. She’s be’n here more’n a week, an’ hasn’t be’n to church. An’ she didn’t attend th’ ice-cream sociable, th’ last o’ th’ season, too. Hasn’t be’n in th’ village but three times, an’ never speaks t’ nobuddy.”

“Actress; no doubt of it.”

“Who’s an actress?” boomed a male voice from the kitchen doorway; and Uncle Billy marched in.

There was a flutter; nothing more. The four

## NO

women were rather spellbound over the suddenness of his appearance.

“Are you talkin’ ’bout Miss Wynne, who I’m fishin’? Well, I’ll have y’ know, now ’n’ hereafter, she ain’t no actress.”

“How d’ you know she ain’t?” asked his wife.

“How d’ I know? Ain’t I got eyes ’n’ ears? She ain’t no actress; she don’t do no self-advertisin’; an’ self-advertisin’ ’s meat ’n’ drink t’ all th’ actors I ever see. Keep your meddlin’ tongues off ’n Miss Wynne. That’s all I’ve got t’ say.” He flung his cap savagely into a corner.

The three visitors rose, settled their bonnets dignifiedly, smoothed their gowns, and stalked out, not, however, missing the opportunity of extending a commiserating glance at Uncle Billy’s better half.

“Now look what you went an’ done!”—on the verge of tears.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

“Whut I went an’ done! Dod-gast it! Them busyboddies—”

“Willyum!”

“I tell y’ I won’t have ’em in my kitchen.”

“Your kitchen!”—for the benefit of the three who were just passing the window.

“My house, then, ’f that ’ll suit y’ better. Buzzin’ away decent folks’ reputations. Them three make more trouble ’n a sturgeon in a nest o’ bass eggs. Tell everythin’ they hear, ’n’ ball it all up when they tell it. They drove two ministers out o’ th’ village already, with their twistin’ tongues. An’ whut riles me is, you let ’em in here t’ bulldoze you int’ believin’ all they say.”

He yanked his supper off the back of the stove and ate it with a deal of banging and rattling and rumbling.

“I’m sure I don’t ask ’em t’ come here with their tales,”—sure that the trio were now out of ear-shot.

“Mebbe; but I notice y’ don’t stuff your ears none.” He got up from the kitchen table.

## NO

“’F anybody wants me, I’m out t’ th’ boat-house; got t’ overhaul th’ dinged engine. ’F I was rich I’d throw th’ blame loony ol’ sputterer int’ th’ middle o’ th’ lake!”

He worked by lantern. He had the tops of the cylinders off, when Cranford came in.

“Billy, do you want to make ten dollars?”

“Ten? Well, now—”

“I want you to take me over to Kingston right away.”

“Whut?—t’night?”

“Yes.”

“Can’t be done, Mr. Cranford. Do it fer nuthin’ in a minute, ’f I could. First place, I’m takin’ th’ engine apart; second place, they ain’t no oil, not till t’morrow mornin’. An’ whut th’ dickens y’ want t’ go t’ Kingston fer?”

“I want very much to see a man there.”

“Sakes alive, why’d n’t y’ see him this afternoon?”

“Didn’t want to keep Miss Wynne, who was tired. Can’t possibly go, then?”

“Nope. Ticklish job, anyhow, goin’ over

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in th' dark. Smells windy. Take th' boat in th' mornin'."

"Anybody else I could get?"

"Nope. No oil anywhere. Tank wasn't filled this afternoon. Goin' out t' Pidgin t'morrow?"

"Hang Pidgin! Mark my words, Billy, you'll get caught out there one of these days, and caught hard."

"But I ain't hungry fer Pidgin!" protested Uncle Billy.

"You ought to be able to fake up some excuse."

"Not with Miss Wynne listenin'."

Cranford chewed the stem of his pipe. "I suppose I'll have to give up the idea of going over to Kingston. Instead, I'll go out to the farm and give Miss Wynne a lecture and try to convince her of the real danger this time of the year. A big blow is due. You remember when we hit Galoo."

"I ain't fergittin' it none. Say, is Miss Wynne an actress?"



## NO

“A what? Good lord, no! What put that idea into your head?”

“I dunno,”—uneasily.

“I’m familiar with the faces of all the well-known women of the stage, and Miss Wynne is not among them. But it wouldn’t matter a lot if it was.”

“Wouldn’t?”

“No; of course not. What the deuce is on your mind?”

“Well,” began Uncle Billy diffidently, twiddling the screw of the wrench in his hand and eying it severely; “well, some o’ th’ dinged females ’ve be’n stuffin’ th’ missus that Miss Wynne’s an actress. I told ’em she wasn’t.”

“Would it make any difference if she was?”

“Not t’ me. But them kind o’ folks ain’t thought much of in th’ village.”

“Why?”

“Lord! I dunno why.”

“Billy,” said Cranford, when he had done laughing, “the real actress these days is a personage, and nearly always a well-bred gentle-

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woman. The rot your females have been reading about actresses concerns the chorus-lady. She *is* troublesome."

"I didn't know they was any difference. Couple o' years ago some actresses stayed up at th' hotel, an' cut up high-jinks. But, ding it! actress 'r not, Miss Wynne's th' finest lady I ever see;" and he thumped the nearest cylinder to emphasize the declaration. "But I wish y' would git her out o' this Pidgin idee. I dunno whut 't is, but seems t' me they's sumpin more 'n fish out there. You know 'n' I know th' game is fishin' all th' known places, tryin' your luck everywheres. T'day was th' first time she's fished anywhere but Pidgin. An' by golly! that makes your uncle think. I got t' fix them bass this very night. Ain't she some fisherman, though? Mebbe that five pounder wasn't a wrastlin' match! Oh, my! All in when she got th' net under 'im. I had t' h'ist 'im in myself. A perfeck fish. Anyhow, you come out t' Pidgin, too; it'll be safer all around.

## NO

Don't tell her, but my ol' bones 'r whisperin' there's goin' t' be a blow before mornin'."

"So much the better. I'll follow, if it takes me out to Duck Island."

It was a mile and a half out to the farm. Cranford covered the ground with the swinging stride of a man who knew how to walk. A great ruddy September moon was clearing the tops of the trees in the east. A silvery blue haze dimmed the outline of the river.

Smead. He had really seen the man. Imagination never played such tricks; fancy could never have created that bulk, the cane and the bad limp. He had seen him, and in turn Smead had seen him and taken to cover. Deviltry of some order was afoot. It hung about Smead as miasma hangs about swamps. Reprisal? Were they after him? He laughed. If it came to a physical contest they would have their hands full. Smead was not a man to ignore, however; strong, daring, resourceful, teeming with the facile cunning of the accom-

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plished blackleg. Filibusterer, gambler, smuggler, book-maker at the race-tracks, owner of a string of gambling houses that reached from New York to San Francisco; what had he not turned his predatory hand to! Well, he had cut Smead's claws in one direction: his smuggling days were over. The confiscation, the heavy fine and the suspended sentence would keep him to other affairs for some years to come.

Lucky thought that, to take a jaunt into Kingston. They might have surprised him. Now he was on guard. And immediately he forgot all about Smead.

Love. He paused and looked at the moon. And ten days ago she hadn't existed to his knowledge. Ten wonderful days. He went on, lightly humming the aria from *Martha*. A glorious night; opal mists lay upon the meadows, and the black shadows were the kine; the tops of the corn-fields were like silver plumes; a rabbit scurried across the road; an owl hooted

to its mate; and there were strange rustlings and flutterings in the leaves about. Presently he saw the lights of the farm, twinkling in and out of the grove of pines that stood like sentinels before the house.

His keen roving eye discovered a white patch against the misty drab of the old dock; and his heart bothered him, there was a thickness in his throat, and the backbone of his courage was nowhere. Yet, with the lightness and sureness of the hunter that he was, he crossed the rubble and shale between him and the dock almost noiselessly.

“Good gracious!” she exclaimed. But that was the woman of it: for she had seen him approaching (not that she had been watching!) some five minutes back. The eagerness of the stride had made her tremble a little; she knew not exactly why. “You came along as noiselessly as a cat. Excuse me for not rising.” She made room for him on the steamer-rug; and shortly four heels beat a light tattoo against

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the piles of the dock. "What a night! Isn't it splendid?"

She turned her face toward him. It was as beautiful as moonlight, and her eyes were as deep and mysterious as the voids beyond. It was mighty hard work for him to resist taking her in his arms then and there. Perhaps it would have been better if he had.

"I have a confession to make," he began at once. The smaller pair of heels became silent instantly. "I'm not going to sail under false colors any longer. Up here they think I'm a millionaire, and I've never taken the trouble to disabuse their minds. Lord knows, I'm not. My grandfather was; but he was a duck-and-drake chap. You know what I mean." The little heels began the tattoo again, relievedly. "He made a dozen fortunes and spent them. And my own poor dad killed himself trying to save something out of the wreck for me. Work has been my portion."

"Work is good for all of us."

## NO

“But you don't know what kind of work I do. It's a sneak's business. I'm a special agent of the secret service; and my duty is to learn when and where jewels are purchased, to keep track of them, to see that they are not smuggled in free of duty; and whenever these purchases are confiscated, I am given my moiety. I hate it all. It's not a gentleman's business. But my grandfather's blood in me craves for comforts, the good things of life. If I did the work because I believed it to be right, my duty, I shouldn't mind. I came up here to forget it all, to rehabilitate my pride; but I saw a man to-day who brought it all back, a thousandfold keener.”

“In Kingston?” Her voice was only mildly curious; but there was thunder in her ears.

“Yes. The man wasn't my friend. I didn't tell you the truth. He's a blackleg, and if ever a man deserved hanging, this man Michael Smead does. A professional gambler, and not a particularly honest one at that, a smuggler,

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and many other detestable things. You see, two weeks ago I tripped him up, spoiled his game; and I've got an idea that he's up here with the thought of reprisal."

"Reprisal!"

He took an envelope from his pocket. "If anything should happen to me; that is, if I shouldn't turn up some morning, wire to the address on this envelope; nothing more will be necessary. It's my man's address; and he's the chap who'll pull me out of any trouble. Thanks. I'm not a coward; but these men will move in the dark; they never come out in the light."

Their hands touched as she took the slip of paper; hers were icy cold. He waited patiently for her to speak. By and by he looked at her closely. She was watching the flash-flash of the light out at Pidgin.

"You don't think any the less of me for my getting this off my conscience?"

"Why should I?" Ah, how her heart ached,



## NO

ached! Yet she spoke smoothly: "Some one capable must do this work; and nobody works for nothing these days, not even for patriotism. You are a good deal of a boy. Perhaps you ought not to have told me. The fact that you do not like the work gives me to infer that you still retain some of your ideals; and I consider that remarkable in a man who is thirty-five." To patter along like that, she thought, without a break in her voice!

"Drat Uncle Billy!" He laughed. "Thirty-five makes me feel like an old man. But I don't know; I never feel more than twenty up in this country."

"Is there really danger?"

"I don't know. But, never mind that. Don't go to Pidgin to-morrow," he urged impulsively; "don't go out there any more. It is honestly and truly dangerous. This is the time of year for the sudden north-gales. They pop out of nowhere; almost before you can turn head-on to them. You can always ride a sou'-wester

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down the river, no matter how hard it blows; but no motor-boat afloat can weather the savagery of these northers, white-capped, short, choppy, smashing and running a mile a minute. I know; I was caught in one once. I think I told you about it."

After all, she was an actress, consummate. "I am not afraid; I can take care of myself. I love the danger, the game of chance. Didn't I tell you that I was born at sea?"

"You might be the bravest woman living, but that would not be of any use to you if you were caught out there."

"Very well; after this week, then, I promise not to go out to Pidgin. Will that do?"

"I suppose it will have to do—ah, Diana!"

"No, Mr. Cranford." She stood up quickly, and of necessity, he rose also. "Just good friends. I know. The moonshine, the beauty of the night; it gets into one's head. Just friends, always. Another September I shall come up, mayhap, and we'll fish and hunt again.

## NO

Please be just a boy; don't spoil it. What do you know about me? Nothing. And I am not in the mood to make confidences. Please; just good friends."

"I should lie if I told you I did not love you."

"I am sorry. If you can not accept my friendship upon the basis I offer it, there mustn't be any more shore-dinners."

"No hope?"

"None."

"It is simply impossible not to ask why."

"I can not marry any man, Mr. Cranford, if that will comfort you."

With dread foreboding he said: "You are already married?"

She turned her head aside and did not answer.

"I can not let you go out of my life like this!"

"I don't want to go out of it. Friends. I am very unhappy, very lonely. Friends."

## PIDGIN ISLAND

"Friends, if you will have it so. But it's a jolt. Funny old world! Ten days ago I didn't know you existed; now I am asking you to marry me, and you belong to some one else."

"But you are going to be brave about it. You're going to be the out-of-door friend; and some day you're going to be glad that I couldn't marry you. I'm very tired. I'm going in. Good night."

He wrung her hand and held it as he helped her up to the road.

"Good night. I'm only an unlucky duffer. Don't worry about me. I'll get myself in hand to-morrow. Good night."

She stood in the shadow of a pine and watched him go along the road, his head bent, the spring gone from his step; watched him with unwavering dry eyes till he vanished from view around the turn in the road. It was to be; she had known it since noon. Better to twist his heart than to break it.

Heavy-footed, she traced the path to the

## NO

house, entered silently and went up to her room. She did not light the candle, but sat down by the window and stared again at the winking lights far down the west; and breathed hard, and muttered lowly, and shut her hands. Pidgin Island! Day by day, hoping, waiting, watching. That he should have made such a confession to her: like a boy who had done something he was ashamed of and was sorry for it!

Reprisal? No. They should not harm one hair of his head.

## CHAPTER IX

### TWO GUESTS

**I**T was a long, long way back to the hotel that night. Never had the road seemed so weary. Once, going before him over the white dusty road, a deep purple shadow sailed. A cloud. An hour ago there had been nothing in the heavens but the brilliant moon and the faded stars. He let the unhappy dream go and looked toward the west. War-clouds, flying swiftly into the face of the moon; and long before he reached the village limits, moonlight had vanished; and a new petulant lap-lap sounded at the river's brim; and a shivering metallic rustle among the trees, as if they were whispering among themselves that the unending warfare 'twixt wind and wood was about to be renewed, and perhaps here and there was

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moaning for the valiant soon to be laid low. How nature adapts herself to our needs! An hour ago, beauty in the heavens and serenity in his heart; now, the flying portents of a storm.

“Blow!” he said aloud.

Blow hard enough to keep her away from Pidgin. And why was her gaze turned eternally toward that island, which he was beginning to hate, in name and thought? He loved every rock, shoal, ledge, island, tree, in these mighty waters; yet, here was his anger directed against an old love simply because it was no longer a frank open danger but a menace, mysterious and hull-down, as sailors say.

Married.

At the hotel he called for his mail and retired to his room.

Married. He sought his pipe mechanically. Married and unhappy. For she would have laughed if she hadn't been unhappy. Oh, the fool of a man who would permit a woman like

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this to be unhappy! To go heart-free all these years, and then to fall in love with a woman who belonged, if not spiritually at least legally, to some one else: who did not care for her, who made her unhappy. Could a woman be made unhappy by a man she did not love? Assuredly she could. There were a thousand petty cruelties man might wage against her without danger of being hauled into court. No hope; she had said it plainly and definitely, but she had said it kindly.

Wynne. Dead man's shoes. Hang the world! For the sake of a few teas and dinners and receptions, for the sake of much envy and admiration, church-music and flowers, a girl throws herself headlong into matrimony and finds—what? Where was this man Wynne? Why wasn't he up here with her where he belonged? Money, probably; a business transaction on the man's part; something to hang clothes and jewels on when he went to the opera or gave a dinner. Well in-



## TWO GUESTS

deed he knew the kind. After the honeymoon they returned to their old haunts; a man's man, a drinking, card-playing, stage-door sort of a chap. And now all her illusions were gone, and she ran away alone to the wood and the big waters to ease the hurt. Wynne. He would find out all about him, if it were possible. Uncle Billy called her Miss Wynne; but that signified nothing, for Uncle Billy would have called Queen Victoria Miss Guelph. He believed all women unmarried unless they introduced their husbands.

Cranford knocked his pipe on his heel and opened his mail; found some forgotten club-dues, an invitation to a wedding, another to a house-party in the Adirondacks, and an affectionate letter from his grandmother (mother's side) thanking him for the birthday check, and a bundle of newspaper clippings from the watchful Warren. Odd bits of news here. The Princess Xenia had gone into bankruptcy in Paris, and the famous emerald necklace had

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been found to be spurious. She had tried to sell it to steady her tottering fortunes. Quite a yarn about it. The spurious stones had been at her bankers for nearly two years; they had been real and precious enough once upon a time. She had evidently known nothing about the substitution. It was too late now for any chance of recovering them. The princess was prostrated in her dismantled apartments. An additional clipping concerned the exploits of the princess. Cranford had often endeavored to get a glimpse of his dazzling compatriot, but he had never succeeded. The daintiest, most irresponsible woman on the continent; mad as a March hare, wild as a partridge; with the face of a child and the heart and soul of an odalisk, and a money-maw as deep as the bottomless pit. Heavens, what escapades! Her title was one of courtesy, mayhap a jest; but it clung to her. She had danced in cabarets on tables; won and lost fabulous sums at Ostend and Monte Carlo;

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ridden in air-ships; broken up happy homes and created scandal after scandal; had flown to Budapest with a fiddler; married an Indian rajah, and deserted him for a Himalayan explorer and had been lost in the wilds for more than a year; and now she had gone bankrupt in Paris. That was life, provided you wanted that kind. She had left behind her a bleak area: like a prairie fire. A real adventuress who had had tremendous adventures. Bankrupt. In other words, tit for tat: she had fallen in love with some scoundrel who had adroitly fleeced her.

Cranford laid aside the clippings, answered his letters, and wrote the following to me:

“ . . . My vocabulary isn't up to it, my boy. I can only say that she is just splendid. Artemis reincarnated. And her name is Diana Wynne. Will you do me a great favor? Will you hunt up all the Wynnes and send me a little biography of each? Don't bother about the middle-class. Not that I'm snobbish; but she comes from the best of stock. You can

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tell that at a glance. She is learned without being pedantic; traveled. What do you think of a girl who quotes from *Pippa Passes* one moment and then skips back to old Malesherbes? Knows her Horace, too; and can tell you how many lemon-wood tables Seneca had in his gardens. She sparkles like a handful of diamonds. You know I've always been waiting to find a woman who knew how to fish. And dash it, she's married. Isn't that rough luck? Now, don't go writing me advice. I neither need nor want it. . . ."

So I didn't. I looked up the Wynnes, but couldn't find any husband for her. But it will be seen that I did not look carefully enough.

A gale was blowing on the morrow; the winnowed sky promised beautiful land weather, but idleness for the fisherman. There was backbone to the wind; steady, strong and without gusts. It bowed the tree-tops unceasingly, whistled under the eaves and boomed in the chimneys. Hundreds of gulls were on the wing. A dozen big freighters hugged the

## TWO GUESTS

breakwaters; and the early boat from Kingston had to come by way of the foot of Wolfe Island, and even then she had her work cut out for her.

Only two passengers came down her plank.

"What's your plan?"

"We'll go straight to Watertown and rent an automobile. Into the train with you."

"All right, Donny. Aren't we due for some fishing as a side issue?"

"I'll see to that, Fagin. The idea is to come in from Watertown. Nobody has noticed us. We'll engage a guide and play no bluff. Coming from Watertown we'll keep an eye open for a deserted farmhouse. It won't be hard to find. We'll rent it to-morrow and take out supplies. Then, when everything is ready, our friend from the secret service will do the disappearing act. Nothing rough, mind you; just a temporary sequestration."

"I understand." The man called Fagin tickled the ends of his wiry fingers against his

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bristly black mustache. "I suppose I'll have to act as his guardian angel."

"That's the ticket."

"I'll play the Uncle Tom game; black face. I'd hate to cut this mustache again. I'll be able to shine my boots with it one of these fine days. And Pidgin Island?"

"I'll look out for that."

"The old man made a foolish move coming up."

"He'll keep to his room."

Fagin let an admiring glance stray over the strong handsome young face. Here was a lad! The real boss, the chap who had the imagination, even if Smead took all the credit. Never hummed and hawed, but struck out on first-thoughts and generally hit the bull's eye. Queer old cock, though; moody when everything was running smoothly and whistling-gay when his back was to the wall.

"Donny, the Princess Xenia has gone broke."

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"She has? Well, what of it?"

"May I ask you a question?"

"Not if it has anything to do with her. Fagin, put this in your pipe: my private affairs are my own. I know exactly what's on your mind, but it's none of your business. Read your paper. Here comes the conductor for the tickets. Don't bother me again for a while. I've got a lot of thinking to do. I want to map out everything."

"Mum it is."

Fagin opened his newspaper and searched for the news of the sporting world; but once he found it, the usual intelligence blocked and columned before his eyes failed to hold his interest. His thoughts persisted in roving to the boy at his side. Who was he? Where did he come from? Wasn't a day over thirty. Lucky, too. There wasn't a hard line in his face, if you didn't look too closely; full-lipped, with a skin as fresh as a girl's, and a constitution apparently impervious to the sudden out-

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bursts of wild dissipation. Funny thing; never got intoxicated above his ears, never fumbled a card, never made any mistakes, and often fleeced the precious rogues who plied him with wine. The real article, for there was not a bit of remorse in his whole make-up; if there was, none of the boys could say he had seen evidences of it. The women ran after him, but he was as cold as ice. No moon-sick sentiment about Donny. Wasn't there a wife somewhere in the background? Fagin could not recollect; he had known the boy but three eventful years.

The Princess Xenia. The paper sank slowly upon Fagin's knees and his gaze roved to the river, sparkling in the distance. It was none of his business; but curiosity was very strong within him. At the villa on the way between Paris and Versailles he had seen the tantalizing will-o'-the-wisp on her knees before this boy; he had heard her passionate sobs; he had seen the cigarette smoke curl from the boy's smiling



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lips, seen the shrug of the graceful shoulders; she who had flouted dukes and princes and rajahs and woven her spider-web for the ruin of many an honest man! He knew; he, Fagin. Half a million in emeralds had slipped through the boy's fingers. He remembered the flush days of last winter; he had seen those emeralds flow over the green tables. A beautiful golden rain of louis had gone up the spout instead of down.

Well, he would not bother the boy. He had seen him angry but once; that moment had been sufficient. So long as they worked together he proposed to play the game straight. It would not be wise to play it other. He was anxious that this deal should be cleaned up as scheduled. He wanted to get back to his true-love, which was an ancient game played with shiny bits of pasteboard, played always with the same invariable luck. It never occurred to him that, plucker himself of pigeons, he was always being plucked, that ill-gotten money was

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cursed with *wanderlust*, that the predatory batten on the predatory, like the fish in the sea.

If only he could have looked into the heart of his companion. Ah, there was a soul there, under the muck, a soul in mortal damnation, if you will: hating himself and hating all the world about him. They tell me that there is hope for the man who can despise something, if only himself; that every poisonous weed has some good in it. Maybe.

Sometimes in mad dreams haven't you found yourself frantically building walls and barricades to hold off the demoniacal pursuers? So this young man built walls and barricades of reckless deeds to hold at bay the inexorable pursuit of memory, which can not be held at bay, which is in actuality far more relentless than any shapes in dreams. Providence so kindly arranges it that we can wake out of dreams; but there is no surcease from Nemesis. There had been a time when he could have put forth the plea that he hadn't known. But

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revelation had come to him, the gracious opportunity denied of no man; and he had rejected it. Now the eating of dead-sea fruit.

At identically the same time the ordinary and the exceptional rogue arrived in Watertown, there stepped down from another train a slender woman dressed in black, heavily veiled. She was in mourning for happiness. The Great Ironist plays sorry tricks with His puppets; He delights in bringing shoulder to shoulder the seeker and the sought, and turning them at variant angles the very instant they are about to meet. The slender figure in black conveyed nothing to the exceptional rogue; his mind was active with the exigencies of the work before him. On her part she did not look around, experienced no shock; no occult sense told her of the young man's propinquity. Guided by one of the station porters she proceeded directly to the near-by hotel and was assigned to a room.

The two men asked to be directed to the

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best garage. There, after some dickering, they rented a comfortable car. They expected to use the car for a week at least. The terms were ten dollars the day and five hundred deposited against accidents to the car.

"You are total strangers to me, sir," said the proprietor of the garage. "I must protect myself."

"That's reasonable enough," agreed the exceptional rogue. He counted out five one hundred dollar bills and laid them on the desk. "Now, supposing you make out a check, dated one week hence. Then we'll go over to your bank and leave it with the cashier. When the car is returned I'll go to the bank and get my money."

"That's easy," replied the proprietor.

Fagin's expression was one of puzzlement.

The affair was accomplished in short order, and the two set out for the river.

"Donny, what new kind of flimflam is this going to be?"

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“Fagin, you can’t even think honestly, can you? This is as straight as the road. That was real money; Smead’s. I mapped out most of this last night. No piking this trip. When we get out into the country, I’m going to show you another little trick. Nothing like being thorough.”

Half an hour later he turned the car into a deserted lane and stopped. From out of his suit-case he took two new license numbers, state of Pennsylvania. These he substituted for the ones in use; and out into the main highway they sped.

“You’re a wonder,” admitted Fagin, grinning. “But what a chance to do some fancy business in buzz-wagons! My, my! Or hold up a bank-messenger.”

“Our business is to give this fellow Cranford a vacation. He’ll be wide awake and wondering. Smoke up and let me see what speed I can get out of this junk.”

In the meantime (what a necessary, good

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old-fashioned phrase it is!) the young woman took off her veil and ordered a light breakfast. Her face was as pale as new ivory and as delicate as a Neapolitan intaglio. She smiled as the maid brought in the eggs and tea and toast. The smile was like throwing open the blinds of a dark room and letting in a flood of sunshine. Dimly the maid recognized that here was a personage; more dimly still she saw tragedy in the great gray eyes which did not smile at all.

So here they are, the twisted hearts of this autumn's tale: the cameo-faced woman in black; the girl who was born at sea; the young man who fled from memory; Cranford, who bravely gathered his rue; Smead, who saw the lees in his pleasure-cup.

## CHAPTER X

### A ROUGE

**W**HEN I was a lad (first personal, singular, perpendicular again!) I entertained several exaggerated ideas, pardonable distortions of an over-nimble imagination, supplied at various times (now in the woodshed, now in the garret, and again from between the covers of my geography) by the romances published by Mr. Beadle, of fearsome memory. Among those boyish fallacies was an almost irradicable impression that a man to be a villain must look the part; beetling eyebrows, hooked nose, a blue-black mustache with dagger points, and a shiny plug-hat atop it all, or a bloody bandanna if he happened to be a pirate. He was invariably going about the accomplishment of his nefarious plots with much “aha-ing!” and “oho-ing!”

## PIDGIN ISLAND

For a long time I "shadowed" the alderman in our ward, hoping to catch him in a counterfeiters' den or red-handed in an abduction. Upon a certain day I was confronted with the appalling information that he was the meekest church deacon in town. It was a rough blow, totally unexpected. I was staggered. There was a kink in the social fabric somewhere. Close upon the heels of this disillusion came the thundering revelation which bowled me over completely. The kindly old man with the gray side-whiskers who gave me pennies and patted me on the back had made his fortune selling spurious mining-stock to orphans and widows and shop-clerks. It took me some time to readjust my outlook upon life. But the final crash which embittered my soul and made a misanthrope of me till I had puppy-love was the shattering of the idol to whom I had given my boy's hero-worship. Handsome, young, debonair, poor, courted, famous for his affability, he had married a woman for her money,



## A ROUGE

and had given nothing in return; denied her children, mocked her with his affairs, and was even known to strike her. Servants' chatter turned this loose. It wasn't a beautiful thing for a boy to learn. I lost faith in humanity, and I haven't regained much even to this day.

My father did not find it necessary to moralize over my questionable regard for the tales of Mr. Beadle. I myself took them out to the rear of the house and made a bonfire of them.

Shortly after, I stumbled upon one D'Artagnan and Milady and His Eminence; David Copperfield and Mr. Heep; the false Stuart and Beatrice; Vautrin and the distinguished provincial; Valjean and Javert. I was sixteen at that time. And I gleaned from that wonderful treasure-house, my father's library, that heroes and heroines of all shapes and color were principled men and women, just that, living and dying in honor, roughly or meekly; that all others were true villains.

So, then, I come to Smead.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

Put out into the streets at the age of five, he had grown up like a weed, strong, hardy, unprincipled. To begin with he had never had any principles, and never acquired any. Later, in his manhood, he wrote down one law for himself: "Don't get found out." Early in his career he had fallen in with boxers and prize-fighters, and he soon became known as a great little "try-out" man. He followed this game for several years, never smoked, never drank, read a good deal, studied and practised all known games of chance, and corrected his speaking English, learning in some odd way that the well-spoken man went farthest. At twenty, blond as a viking, of beautiful body, affable, winning, he made his first smoke-room trip. The intellectual veneer hoodwinked all the women aboard and nearly all the men. It was a profitable trip, as smoke-rooms go. He became the most expert ship-gambler in the business because he worked alone, which seems rather an impossible feat to the layman. He

## A ROGUE

took infinite delight in playing the gull to his kind and plucking them.

He was twenty-four when he put up his first gambling establishment. It made money from the start. And with rare foresight he never visited the place at night during the play. He would generally drop into the cashier's office early in the afternoon, balance the accounts and leave. Thus, he was unknown to all save his employees and the police who blackmailed him regularly once a month. His Atlantic trips now became few and far between. He began to smoke and drink, circumspectly, for none knew better than he what a good business asset a clean healthy skin was. He became a member of two or three fairly decent clubs. He was getting on; the street urchin and the "try-out" man were forgotten.

He married. She was the daughter of a rich man whose forebears had been rich when New York was known by another name. The father strenuously objected to the match. With the

## PIDGIN ISLAND

blind obstinacy of her sex she ran away with Smead, and was promptly disinherited. Perhaps the poor woman knew two or three months of happiness. Smead had married her with an eye to the future millions; and upon seeing them take wings, the veneer cracked. He enlarged his gambling enterprises, took up ship-gambling again, drifted into the fast set of the city, let his long smothered desires run riot. All the evil in him developed with the sinister rapidity of nightshade. His irons and fires became multifarious. He tried his hand at smuggling; not for the pecuniary gains so much as for the sporting chance it offered. He became as closely watched as any man in the world; but time after time he slipped through the Customs. Often he was not smuggling at all; just pure deviltry to keep the inspectors and the secret service on the jump. They believed he stood alone, never suspecting that he was the brain and heart of a colossal organization. The poor foolish woman who married him

## A ROGUE

died of a broken heart: for women die of that as surely as they breathe.

Here you have him, a picturesque villain under his thatch of gray, of a type common enough in cities. Petty rascality. On the race-track and in his gambling establishments he was called square, a sporting term for any one not found out. Oh, he was generous and free-handed—outside of his home. And there you have the gist of villainy. It is at his fire-side that a man is proven. We who meet him outside, at the clubs, in the hotel lobbies, we vote him a first-rate chap; but before we give our confidence, let us see the wife who waits and watches at home.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Well?”

“Going along finely,” said the doctor. “You are naturally robust.”

“How long before I’ll be able to throw this cane out of the window?”

“Perhaps two weeks, if you are careful.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

No whisky. I don't think tobacco will hurt you. Good morning."

No whisky. Smead grinned at the lighted end of his cigar. They little knew him. He drank because he liked it, not because it had any hold on him. Give him credit for that much; he could stop it, he had done so many a time. For two weeks, then, nothing stronger than coffee should pass his lips. He scowled down into the brilliant sunshiny street. The scowl was becoming a habit. What fool instinct had possessed him to make this trip? Heretofore he had invariably kept in the background. But the crutch exposure had made him restless and reckless. The only man who had ever brought him up with a jolt: a club loafer, a society tea drinker, a fellow who bought his clothes in London and wore spats; a government sneak who had spoiled his sport. He would make Cranford regret the day he had meddled with him.

What was it? Why were his thoughts

## A ROGUE

always harking back and digging up things he had almost forgotten? Perhaps it was because he had never been inactive before, without diversion. For Smead was a man of tremendous physical vitality and activity; he was the kind of man who would be busy at something till he dropped. The mental blindness of the man that obscured the true fact, that had he applied his talents in the right direction he would have been this day wealthy and honored! For more than three weeks now he had had little else to do but think. It seemed to him that his thoughts had come full tilt against a barrier; he could not lift them over and beyond; and the rebound carried them back to the days he believed forgotten.

Sometimes from out the shadows, in the hour between the last glow of daylight and the first glare of the lamp, a face peered at him. But he never surrendered. Instead, he would ring for the boy, order newspapers and nail his thought upon the printed page. Was he afraid?

## PIDGIN ISLAND

Remorse? No! By the Lord Harry, he would never regret anything; what he had done was done, and he would stand by it. But the newspaper barriers could not hold back the flood. He was filled with great dissatisfaction. The boy's sudden and inexplicable attitude disturbed him. It disordered his plans for the future. The primordial instinct of man to be succeeded was strong in him. And now he faced a cold-blooded, immutable rebellion. From whence came this spirit? Heretofore the boy had been docile enough.

The wisp of smoke from his cigar grew thinner and thinner, and presently died away altogether. He recalled the boy when he had taught him his first game of cards. The boy's flushed face and eager eyes disclosed to the father that the gambler's blood was there. It took months of coaching to teach the boy to school his face, to forget that he had any nerves. At the age of ten he could sit in a game with his elders and hold his own. How



## A ROGUE

the boys used to laugh and grumble when the lad caught them for a fat pot! Then came the tippling. It was a great art to drink your gull out of his senses and still retain your own. You could play your hands on the level then. At fifteen the boy had a head like a seasoned veteran. He had sent him to college to acquire the polish that he himself lacked. He had even let the boy choose a name for himself, a name that he yet retained. Handsome, graceful, polished, a chap who spoke French and Italian equally well, and who, on the other side of the water, moved among the swells. And the women went mad over him. Wasn't it in Rome that one had slashed him across the chin? Chip of the old block. Open rebellion. He simply could not make it out.

Faces in the shadow again; two, this time, the one like Niobe, the other like Judith.

"Bah!" he said, as a child says "boo!" to a dark stairway.

He looked at his watch. Eleven o'clock. He

## PIDGIN ISLAND

ought to be here now, unless the lake was too rough. He peered up at the sky, blue as a robin's egg.

And then the door opened.

"Ha!" said Smead with satisfaction.

"How's the leg?"

"Better. I've cut out whisky for two weeks."

"I told you to. Well, everything on my side runs like clockwork. I'll have Cranford out of the way in a night or two. Now, what's your news?"

"The steamer makes Quebec day after to-morrow, perhaps to-morrow night. You trust that agent of yours?"

The son laughed. "Not an inch. Something better than that. Fear. He knows me; a false move means prison."

Smead nodded approvingly. "The right idea. Now listen. Don't go fooling around the water in the morning. That's the time I'll wire you. May send you a night message. I

## A ROGUE

haven't asked you how you got your hands on these things."

"Don't. I shouldn't tell you."

"All right,"—amiably. "I agreed to back the game for a third. That's enough for me. You've got a head on you."

"Thanks!"—ironically.

"But don't forget that Cranford may have done some advising."

"All due to you. If you hadn't dropped in, he'd never dreamed of anything off color. But what's the use of arguing with you?"

"No use whatever. At best, he'll never tumble; he'll only worry and wonder."

"Maybe. He's no fool."

"No." Smead's face hardened. "I'd give ten thousand to break him."

"You can break him physically, if you want to."

"What's the good of that? I know his breed. You don't break that sort physically. You break him socially."

## PIDGIN ISLAND

“My words. But there’s a fine chance of that. I tell you, there wasn’t a scrap of paper as big as a postage-stamp that I did not go over. There was absolutely nothing. And he has something that no average man can cope with; pure bull-headed luck.”

Smead took from his pocket a newspaper clipping. He gave it to his son.

“Ah!”

“You never told me about that.”

“Why should I have told you? My affair, that.” The young man laughed. “Good pupil, though; what?”

“Boy,” said Smead quietly—he was determined not to lose his temper to-day—“boy, what I’ve done has been for the love of the sport.”

“Ah, indeed! It was just the love of sport that made you teach me how to riffle a cold-deck, mark an ace with my thumb-nail, and all that?”

“You’ll land hard one of these days, Don.”

## A ROGUE

"Supposing I do? But perhaps I shan't. Maybe I'm going to turn over a new leaf when this job is done; hunt up a new country and begin anew, live straight under another name." The son eyed his father shrewdly.

Smead's glance bored into his. "Do you mean it?"

Was there an appeal in the tone? The young man could not tell. "I always mean it at night, when I'm alone. But maybe you've done your work too well."

"Drop that sanctimonious whine. Begin anew if you want to. God knows—"

"Who?"

Smead flung his cigar out of the window. "No, I shan't get mad. It doesn't pay with you. Go your way, where you like and when. But I'm hanged if you ever lay a hand on my pile when I'm done for."

"That's tough luck! But would you like to know what I'd do with it if you left it to me? I'd give it to orphan asylums, old ladies'

## PIDGIN ISLAND

homes and hospitals; the places you've helped to fill."

Smead drew in a long breath, slowly. "What did you do with those emeralds?"

"Emeralds?"

"Yes. The real stones for which you substituted the paste. I'll tell you this, my lad, I never plucked anything but fat gulls. I never took a dollar from a woman."

"You thought you were going to when you married the mother." A chalky pallor overlaid the tan on the son's face. "Who knows what you have done?" He stepped close, eyes threatening, fists straining.

The two steps were enough. With amazing suddenness the great powerful hands of the seated man reached out and caught the young man by the wrists, whirling him to his knees. With his face but a hand's span away, he said: "You puppy, stir and I'll break your wrists, so help me. Try to come it over me with your tongue, eh? Thought because I can only hop



ARTHUR WILLIAM BROWN -

"Stir and I'll break your wrists"





## A ROGUE

around on one leg, I'm something to stick pins in? What the devil's got into you? We used to get along well enough."

Not a sound for a moment but the heavy breathing of the two men. In Smead's heart there was admiration for the nerve of the boy: not a flicker of the eye, nor did the lips stir.

"Too strong for you, eh?"

"I'll admit that. You were too strong for the mother. I've been thinking about her of late."

Smead gave the wrists a brutal turn. "Leave your mother out of this conversation."

"Can you forget her?" panted the boy.

"You were only six when she died."

"Six. That may be, but there were five years of terror crowded into each of them. . . . If you twist any further, you'll break the right one; and if you do, I'll kill you later on."

Smead flung him aside. The boy got up, brushed his clothes, rubbed his wrists and

## PIDGIN ISLAND

wiped the sweat of agony from his forehead. "I've a notion you'll be sorry for this bit of gallery play. You ask me what I did with the emeralds. I dropped them in the poor-box at Monte Carlo. A great week!"

"Low, I call it."

"Wasn't it?"—mockingly. "Never told you about it; never let you in." Then in cold level tones: "I'll tell you the truth about the Princess Xenia's emeralds. I swore I'd never tell a living soul. Two men she sent to Hades were friends of mine; once upon a time honest. I sold the gems and divided the cash between the two widows. It wasn't a legal restitution, but they'll never be any the wiser. And as for the princess, there are some millions of fools left. So you see, I'm not the pupil you thought I was; weak heart, maudlin sentiment. All Paris said I was in love with her."

"No, they didn't say that. It was the other way around, and you abused her."

## A ROGUE

"Runs in the family. I go back on the two o'clock boat. No fishing to-day, so I thought I'd come over to see how you were."

"No; you came over to see if you couldn't stir me up a bit. Satisfied?"

"Perfectly. Shall I send up a lawyer to alter your will?"

"If you will be kind enough. Now, dig out."

"All right." The son's hand closed over the door-knob.

"Wait a moment. Have you seen her since?"

"Yes."

"Have you spoken to her?"

"No."

"Have you tried to find out what she's doing up here?"

"No."

"Do it."

"Why don't you?"

"Get out. Don't forget the lawyer. I mean it."

## PIDGIN ISLAND

"I shan't." The door opened and closed.

Alone, Smead rocked his leg to ease the throb in it.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE TELEGRAM

**T**HE enormous gray-green rollers came charging in with the precision and alignment and velocity of a Napoleonic army. A brittle light broke and flashed far out; it might very well have served for the illusion of bayonets. Then, too, there was the sound of cannon, of musketry, of shouting and rallying and retreating, flank assaults, sudden deployments and the low moan of the dying. Yet, there it stood, the thin red line against which brigade and battalion flung themselves futilely if thunderously. The picture of battle was all very real to the girl who sat with her feet dangling over the ledge at the end of Tibbet's Point. She had been rereading Hugo that morning,

## PIDGIN ISLAND

and all the wonder and terror of Waterloo seemed spread out before her eyes.

"It's fine to be alive on a day like this," was Cranford's comment.

"Isn't it beautiful? See the sunshine as it strikes through the crest just before it breaks! What color!"

"And in between, where the swoop comes; you can see the black heads of the boulders. Hag's teeth, I call them. Look at the way those gulls cut into the face of the gale. There's your perfect flying-machine. Not a movement of the wings perceptible; all ballast. We actually lay against the wind coming out here; it is positively nothing to those birds."

"If one could only fly like that!"—wistfully.

"And what would you do; fly out to Pidgin?" He smiled as he put the question.

"Perhaps."

The promontory upon which they sat fell sheer to the water, a distance of fifteen feet.

## THE TELEGRAM

The face of the ledge was gored and ribbed and bitten—by a thousand years of ice-floes. Diana stared down at the rivulets left by the receding comber—dead-men's fingers as an old deep-sea sailor had once told her—clutching, creeping, slipping in vain to find lodgment.

“Freedom,” said Cranford, as a gull sailed below his heels.

“Only the water birds know the true feel of freedom. We humans are hobbled. And yet, what a desperate effort we make to fly: rail-roads, automobiles, the liners and air-ships. I often wonder what the birds think of us as they soar over our heads. Poor snails that we are!”

“Who knows? Perhaps we did fly once upon a time. There are many birds even to this day that have forgotten how to use their wings.”

“Look!” She touched his arm and pointed down-shore.

For three days the blackbirds had been swarming and quarreling and flying low. You

## PIDGIN ISLAND

could hear their chatter above the singing bassoon of the wind.

“By George! they’re migrating at last.”

The birds rose, closely packed, straight up, inclining toward the southwest when they reached an altitude of a thousand feet. Round and round the topmost birds circled, calling, calling; dense as the smoke from a ship’s funnel immediately after fresh stoking. Up, higher and higher, till the leader found the break in the air-currents; then slowly they began to sail away, gaining in speed every moment. Occasionally some rebel with ideas of his own would start a few hundreds back across the fields again, round and round a tree-top, to light there for a space, to rise in circles wider and higher; then swift as an arrow from the bow the loiterers joined the mother-flock. Fainter and fainter grew the speckled band across the faded blue of the sky. Presently a single inken spot, and then, good-by!

“Thousands and thousands of birds; how-



## THE TELEGRAM

ever do they do it? They're the noisiest birds that ever were. They've kept me awake with their calling and cheeping. They tell me that regularly each year the birds make the farm the rendezvous for their flight." She shaded her eyes. "They are gone. I can't see even a speck. And all in less than five minutes!"

"Cast a glance at this old comber galloping in. Some water there. Shall we move? We'll get a ducking when she hits."

"Let's stay. Oooh, what a big one!" She huddled her shoulders and twisted one foot about the other.

They waited, laughing like two children. Nearer and nearer the mighty roll of water came; no sign of a crest; higher, greener. It held them like some spell of enchantment. Then it smashed against the ledge with deafening noise. The impact sent a shudder through the ledge: as if some giant's mailed fist had buffeted it. Somehow, as the spray and foam flew up at them, greedily, their hands met and

## PIDGIN ISLAND

their shoulders touched. The movement was neither temperamental nor sentimental; it was instinctive: one quite naturally shrinks from an approaching blow. But the resultant effect upon Cranford was like wine; madness, rather, for he brushed her cheek with his lips.

"Forgive me, but I did not mean to do that!" he cried penitently; when it would have been much better to say nothing.

"We are very foolish, or, rather I am," she replied coolly. "It is my fault that we are both drenched." She wiped the water from her face and inspected her dripping shoes. "We should be sent to bed without supper."

Fear left him. She hadn't noticed; or better still, she chose to ignore the temporary insanity.

Now, during this bit of comedy an automobile had drawn up on the far side of the lighthouse. The two on the ledge had heard nothing, since they could hear only such sounds as the wind carried to them. A man

## THE TELEGRAM

stood by the side of the car. He watched the two thoughtfully, saw the comber rise and break, saw the inclination of the two toward each other, and Cranford's harmless folly. There was no doubt of it; it was she. Beautiful always; and now with the sun on her hair and the wind on her cheeks. . . . An oath burned his lips. He made as though to step forward, but held the impulse in check. Had he not wilfully forfeited his rights? What had brought her here? How had she come to know that idle fool? Rage came again, but once more he smothered it. Later he would take care of the meddler. He glanced at his wrists, black and blue with bruises. It was no time for physical encounter. Well, since she was not alone, there was nothing for him to do but turn about and go back to the hotel.

Cranford espied the car as it rolled down the incline into the road along the shore.

"Some one from the hotel," he said, as he noted the license number. "Shall we return

## PIDGIN ISLAND

to the farm? You will catch cold. The sun is getting low and the wind is blowing cold."

"Come. The walk will warm us both. Are there many at the hotel?"

"Except for two chaps from Philadelphia, I'm the lone fisherman. They haven't had a chance to get out yet. May I smoke?"

"Do." She put on her hat and tucked away the flying strands of hair.

Not a word of reproach, not a sign that she recollected his rudeness: the poise, the perfect mental balance of a woman of breeding. Was he really sorry? No! He was stubbornly glad. The contact of her shoulder, the subtle perfume from her hair, the veil of green water shutting out sky and horizon. . . .

"Pardon?"

"I said that the color of the west promises a break in the gale. We may be able to get out to-morrow."

We! O delectable plural! He trembled, and his voice was not steady as he asked: "Have you missed the sport?"

## THE TELEGRAM

“Dreadfully!”—with a bright smile. “It is aggravating to see all this beautiful land weather go by without a chance to wet a line. Have you seen the big fish on their mounting boards? Don’t they look just like the pictures of Gulliver bound by the Lilliputians, with all those threads crossing and recrossing them? Uncle Billy is a great taxidermist. Don’t tell him, but I intend to give him my bass when he has it finally mounted. I want him to hang it up in the boat-house where future Izaak Waltons may see and learn what a good guide he is. Doesn’t it seem lonesome with all those blackbirds gone! What a noise they made as we came out! The rollers are going down a little. Summer. I hate to see it go. I shouldn’t care to be out at Pidgin now.”

“Nor I!”—heartily. “Fresh water is far harder to fight than salt; it hasn’t the buoyancy.”

“Sand Bay in the morning and Pidgin in the afternoon.”

## PIDGIN ISLAND

“Shore-dinner?”

“Why, surely.”

Cranford's confusion cleared into certainty. She had not noticed the kiss, else she would have put forward some excuse.

It was quarter to six when they arrived at the farm. From the doorway of the ancient farmhouse came the clang of a hand-bell. A picturesque old place, a relic of the days when the Napoleonic refugees set up a small colony here to await the Emperor's escape from St. Helena. The village is filled with pathetic landmarks of this futile dream.

“To-morrow,” she said; and turned and walked toward the farmhouse, stopping only when she reached the door. She laid her hand upon her cheek. How briskly he strode away! She wondered if he was whistling. The manner in which he held his head suggested it. He had kissed her; but it had been only a boy-and-girl kiss, clumsy, awkward, diffident, honest. The thought of it warmed her heart a

## THE TELEGRAM

little. He hadn't meant to do it. May she never be forced to accept tribute from any man less innocent than that kiss. He did not love her; he only imagined he did. It was the result of their mutual loneliness; and when, shortly, in a day or so, she vanished out of his life, he would forget her. She found a letter. She took it to her room to read.

"What fools we poor women are!" was her only comment, upon finishing the missive.

For all that he whistled on the way, it was a busy mind Cranford carried back to the hotel. He could no more have helped stealing that sweet than he could have stopped breathing. The wonder of it was that he had not taken her in his arms . . . another man's wife! Deuce take the world! He kicked a stone out of his path. Not even a frown; well, she hadn't known.

The strength of men! They bound themselves with resolutions of straw, deceiving themselves into believing that these were

## PIDGIN ISLAND

hoops of steel. The right moment, or rather the psychological moment, which is either right or wrong, arrived, and—poof! For three days he had lived in the pleasantest of dreams. He had made believe to himself that she was his, all his. He had waited upon her, run about for her, dug flowers for her, put out the dilapidated croquet-set, told her all the lore he knew of wood and water: built up a wonderful house of cards and had blown it down in the breath of a second. Monumental folly. It was impossible, he argued, that she had not heard his apology; the roar of the water, the breathlessness of the deluge, certainly could not have made it unmeaning to her ears. So she had chosen to ignore it, with the wisdom of her sex. . . . Why had he not taken a good kiss?

“What a fool I am! I’ll be going back and asking her to let me try it all over again.”

His whistle became shriller and more determined; and as he approached the hotel ver-



## THE TELEGRAM

anda the incident was crowded out of his thoughts by possibilities far remote from osculation. His whistle ceased in the middle of a bar; and Flotow must have settled back in his far-away grave, content. A good whistler is as rare as a good sermon. As he mounted the steps a smile lay hidden in the crook of his lips. What were these chaps up to? The short wiry man with the stubbly black mustache he had instantly recognized as one of the two men he had seen in the hotel bar just before leaving New York. The handsome chap was without doubt the same Warren had advised him to watch. At the train gate he had not been able to take an accurate impression of the young man's face, the light being insufficient; but the scar made his identity a certainty. Evidently they thought him something of a fool. So much the better; he would play the fool to see where they would lead him. Whatever their plans were, they could do nothing during the daytime; and at night he loiter-

## PIDGIN ISLAND

ed about the hotel. Mr. Hanchett and Mr. Dennison; very good. He had joined them in a game of three-cushion billiards the previous night, and they had played remarkably well. It amused him to think that if they were laughing in their sleeves, there was room enough in his for a smile.

"Hello!" he said, stepping before their rocking chairs. "Hard luck you chaps are having. You'll get out to-morrow all right, though. The gale is blowing itself out. If I were you I'd try the bay over the way. There's been lee there, and bass will have gone in."

"I'll be glad to meet Mr. Bass," said Mr. Dennison, stroking his mustache.

"That's the trouble with the water up here," said Mr. Hanchett, folding his newspaper. "Great fishing grounds, but it blows too much."

"You have fished here before?"

"Oh, no. The guide has been telling me. How about a little game of billiards after dinner?"

## THE TELEGRAM

"Glad to." Cranford proceeded into the office.

Mr. Hanchett smiled and Mr. Dennison coughed slightly behind his hand.

"Not a tumble," murmured Mr. Dennison.

"There's where you're wrong. He recognized me—how, I don't know—the moment he laid eyes on me. Just a little start, but it was enough for me. Now he thinks we think he doesn't know us; and on that side I'm going to get him."

"And how? He doesn't drink and he stays around the hotel after dark."

"He'll be going out to the farm, as they call it, one night. We'll watch."

"An attraction out there?"

"Yes,"—briefly. "Come on in to dinner."

"Pretty dull work. What's the matter with your wrists?"

"Tried to show my strength in a wrestling match."

"Grizzly bear?"

## PIDGIN ISLAND

Mr. Hanchett shrugged.

The two proved capital table companions. Cranford recognized the fact that he was dealing with rogues of high caliber. How were they going to get him? he wondered. For there wasn't the least doubt in his mind that Smead and these two were here for no other purpose than to do him injury. He determined to take no foolish risks. Much as he longed to get out to the farm, he saw the wisdom in remaining where he was. No serious bodily harm; a bullet through the leg, perhaps; pain and inconvenience. But why hadn't they waited till he was back in New York? Why go through all this bother of coming up here? This phase puzzled him a little. And it worried him, this waiting for some one to spring upon his back.

"You used to be a footballer, didn't you, Mr. Cranford?" asked Mr. Hanchett, as, later in the billiard-room, he scored a beautiful bank-shot.

"Oh, yes; fifteen years ago. But I'm as

## THE TELEGRAM

soft as a pillow these days. A chap never keeps up exercise after the zest goes."

Mr. Hanchett nodded. Very good point. He would have said the same thing in Cranford's place. He missed a "reverse." He smiled slightly as his glance rested upon Cranford's lean brown steady fingers which bore his weight on the table. Cranford scored three and miscued. Mr. Hanchett decided that his opponent was quick, steady-nerved and wiry rather than muscular. All the better. There would be sport for Fagin, who was sometimes known as "Pain" because he knew all the spots on the body where pain lurked, ready to cry out. At nine the game came to an end.

"Try the bay across the river to-morrow. You'll find bass there," said Cranford, racking his cue.

"Thanks; we will."

Cranford went to his room.

"Cool," observed Mr. Dennison.

"Good nerves. We may have trouble."

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"Trust me for that. What do you say to a little game of pinochle?"

"Dollar a hundred points?"

"Anything to pass the time. He will not go out to-night. We might fake a message."

"He may know her handwriting."

"H'm. Anybody you know?"

"How should I know her?" Mr. Hanchett shrugged. "Come on; let's get the game started. Odd thing, but I always think fast when I'm playing a hand. And I've got to do some tall thinking."

Cranford put on his slippers, read a little while, rose and walked the length of the room several times. Once he paused by a window to note the tops of the maples. The gale had blown itself out. He rumbled his hair, resumed his pacing, wound his watch . . . and came to an abrupt halt in the middle of the room. He saw two men leaning against a bar, one big and the other short and wiry; he heard the toast, the fisherman's toast.

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“Pidgin Island!”

“Square away!”

He tingled with the discovery that it was something far more important than reprisal; they were not after him directly, then; only watching him to learn if he knew anything. What was toward? His memory searched hither and thither for thread-ends. Pidgin Island was the key to something. Into what manner of coil had he innocently stumbled? He felt wonderfully alive. Here was a riddle to solve, something to do away with his brooding, something to make him forget the hurt of loving this forbidden woman: for he did love her, with all his heart and soul. He was thirty-five, the age of a man who thoroughly knew his mind.

Now then, to go over carefully from memory the big gems sold during the past summer and spring, those which had not yet been reported at any of the Atlantic ports. Nothing came of it. Smead and company could not

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possibly be concerned with any of these. Cranford possessed a remarkable education in one respect. He had always been fond of gems; not because they represented fortunes; for their loveliness alone. Thus, he knew the history and present owner of every famous gem in the world, every celebrated tiara, necklace, bracelet, pendant. He also knew the imitations generally worn as the originals. As an appraiser he had few equals; and in this manner he became invaluable to the service. But Smead and company were out of his reach. He smoked furiously and stalked noiselessly in his felt slippers. What were they bringing in? A painting? Mona Lisa? Not they! There was no way of cutting that gem from its quaint setting and selling bits of it here and there.

Again, he puzzled over the fact that his presence in nowise seemed to alter their plans, whatever these were. It would have been easy to slip away, to designate a new common ground. Was it sporting blood?—to bring off



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the coup under his very nose and then laugh at him? Or was it a plan of killing two birds with one stone: a fine bit of smuggling for them and even-up for him?

He opened the drawer in the wash-stand and closely scrutinized the contents. Nothing had been disturbed. He had purposely arranged the letters and clippings so that the slightest shifting would have revealed to him that some one had been searching the room. He tore up the letters and clippings; to-morrow he would sprinkle them upon the face of the waters.

Where was the big fellow who had offered the toast that night? Possibly with Smead. He must look sharp.

Smuggling. Up here, out of the beaten track, where no one would dream of looking for them. For these river ports are more or less farces. What was simpler than sending a motor-boat out from Kingston to Pidgin, ostensibly to fish, to meet another boat from the American side? Smead over there and Messrs. Hanchett

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and Dennison here. To cut the ground from under their feet! He smiled happily. He knew at least where the key lay; and all because Smead had chosen the wrong moment in which to sun himself on the Kingston hotel veranda.

To-morrow. . . . He laid down his pipe, astounded. Diana. Always wanting to fish Pidgin; always watching and waiting; sometimes listening to him with unhearing ears while her gaze roved the northern horizon. Came back to him vividly that noon when the game wardens' boat put in; the spell of dizziness which had seized her. Diana Wynne. At which end of this tangle did she stand?

Had the gift of clairvoyance been his at that moment he would have witnessed a little scene which would have still further bewildered him. Cranford had made several journeys by night to the farm, but at precisely quarter to nine she had gone in. She was tired, it had been a long day, she was sleepy, and would he get some

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green corn for the morrow? How easy it is for a woman to send a man on his way, when she wants to be rid of him! Always she entered the village perhaps a quarter of an hour later than he did. She kept close to the shops, avoided what lights she could, and searched keenly among the idling villagers. Once she had escaped running into him by a span.

So. The lonely telegraph-operator was one of the three or four villagers who did not gossip. Doctors, pawn-brokers and telegraph-operators seldom if ever betray confidences. They are the living repositories of human secrets, mostly tragic. Yet, this operator would have given a month's wages to confide to his family the nightly advent in his dingy shop of this beautiful and mysterious young woman. To-night he shook his head as usual.

"Nothing to-night, miss."

"You are sure you understand the instructions?"

"Yes, miss. Any message from a man

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named Smead to another named Hanchett to be delayed twenty-four hours. I'm kind of worried. Your specific orders from headquarters . . . ."

"Might be a forgery?" Diana smiled. From the inner pocket of her outing coat she produced a document. "Read this and quiet your nerves."

His eyes widened. "I guess if they'll back you down there in Washington, I can. . . . Excuse me for a moment." The key was talking. He sat down and took the message. When he rose from the board he was smiling. "A night message from your man. 'Hanchett, Hotel Carlton,'" he read; "'Pidgin to-day; come at four, weather permitting.' It is unsigned."

"It is what I have been waiting for. Thank you. Good night."

By the time the operator had sensed the denomination of the bill, the giver had disappeared.

She hastened toward the town limits. A

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block beyond the telegraph office put her outside the arc-light zone. The night was only starlit; and when the sidewalk ended she took to the road, stepping cautiously till her eyes became accustomed to the dark, the difference between substance and shadow. With that remarkable abruptness with which at night one shadow emerges from another, she saw before her the vague outline of a man. He was walking swiftly in her direction. He passed.

“Di?”

At the sound of that voice—even though she had expected hourly to hear it—an incipient paralysis laid hold of her. The solid earth seemed to sink from under her, leaving her in mid-air.

“Di, is it you?”

Useless to run. The inevitable was here. Rallying with mighty effort her scattered forces, she stopped and waited, very tired, very weary, very unhappy.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE PAST

“**W**HAT are you doing up here?” the man asked impetuously—and at once lost the advantage of the terror his appearance had inspired in her.

This demand from the man she had seen but once in six years, from whom she had hidden with unfailing vigilance, yet always keeping track of him, kindled anew the old fires in her heart, fear, anger, pity, wonder and contempt.

“Have you any right to ask that?”—hotly.

“I believe I have,”—his voice low and smooth. He knew women, this handsome rogue, knew the hearts of them as a violinist knows the strings of his instrument: upon which string to play this moment or that, what *tempo* upon the dry and taut, the damp and loose. Here

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were taut strings, necessitating a light soft touch of the bow. Always he had found it to be so: when woman's voice rang high with emotion, man's voice should gentle her; or, when hers was low and throbbing man's should suddenly dominate. He was withal rather an unusual young man, depending for every move he made upon the mathematics of chance. "You may think I have no right, Di; yet I have, even if ever so little."

"Not one iota, Donald Smead."

"Mr. Hanchett, Mr. Hanchett, if you please."

"I wonder under how many names you have gone in these six years!"

"A good many, Di."

"And how many lies have you told—to other poor women?"

He waved his hand airily toward the sky. "Count the planets. I have often marveled over the breeding quality of the first lie. A stone upon still waters: who knows where the

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ripples end? 'When first we practise to deceive'! There's a deal of truth in those old chaps, the poets. Well, lying came naturally."

She was silent.

"As other lads were taught patriotic odes from fourth readers, I was taught to lie. Lord! but I'm accomplished. The first lie and the last, and all the lies between; I remember, I never forget. To be a first-rate liar one needs memory and imagination. I have both."

She breathed with difficulty. There had always been music in his voice, glamour in his use of it. Her anger dimmed a little.

"What are doing up here in this God-forsaken hole?"

"It is not God-forsaken,"—quietly.

"Perhaps it is my outlook. To me all places are more or less God-forsaken. After all, Di, I have some excuses."

"Once upon a time you had; not now."

"You think, then, that I've had my chance?"

"I know it. I tried to help you. There was



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a time when I would have given my heart's blood to help you; but you lied to me and tricked me."

"And now?" He crushed the eagerness which sprung with the question.

"I would not turn my hand to save you from prison." She uttered the words without heat.

He knew that she meant it. "That, as my beloved father would say, is a haymaker, flush on the jaw. What an old prize-fighter he must have been! Di, in your heart you know you wouldn't let me go to prison."

"I would. It might be the saving of you."

"Dear little Methodist!—or, is it Presbyterian? Repentance? What a word, smuggest of the smug; rolling eyes, clasped hands, the lying lips!"

"Do you never think? Do these things never return to haunt you?—the broken lives, the knavery, the dishoner?"

"I don't believe in ghosts, Di. Besides, it is easy to shoo them away."

## PIDGIN ISLAND

"You are really incapable of telling the truth."

"Well, yes: sometimes they come knocking. They follow from room to room; bolts and oak panels are nothing; but presently I remember where the whisky stands on the sideboard, and poof! they go scrambling out the way they came."

"And when the horror of drunkenness is gone . . .?"

"Oh, then it's morning; sunshine, and work to do. I wish I could see your face." He struck a match. She did not flinch. The flame burned till it nipped his thumb and finger; then he dropped the writhing stick to the ground where it glowed a moment and went out. "Good nerves, Di. Not afraid of anything, are you?"

She did not answer.

"Well, there never was any cowardice on your side or mine."

"Moral?"

"Physical. I have the courage of my crimes,

## THE PAST

you the courage of your virtues. Chaste Diana!" He laughed. "Do you realize that you are one of the two living things I love?"

"The other?"

"Irony, eh? Myself, you would suggest? No. Truth is, Di, I despise myself as heartily as you do. But I've made my bed—of hair-cloth and thorn—and I must lie on it. You doubt that I am capable of loving anything?"

"Oh," she burst out passionately, "if only you had been weak, weak, harassed by the inability to walk straight; if only you had been one of those pitiable beings who are always being led! But, no! You are as strong as steel."

"Steel. A well-tempered blade for another man's hand, to thrust, cut and slash with; and that hand—my father's!" He heard—or did he imagine it?—something like a sob. "Steel, with a rotten fiber running through it. What are you doing up here alone?"

"Have I not always been alone? Well, I

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came up here to be alone, to get away from people; to fish, to make for myself a brief day of happiness, since God refused to give it to me. But you? Let me return the question to you who love cities."

Quickly he caught her by the shoulders. "What is this man Cranford doing? Is he making love to you? Answer!" He shook her.

She put her strong fingers under his and flung him back. At the touch of his hands the old horror of him awoke. "I am not accountable to you for what I do."

"Touch defile you? Cranford is a sneak."

"That is not true."

"He plays the gentleman to his friends and betrays them behind their backs; and takes his whack for doing it."

"Such friends as try to cheat the law. Smugglers. He has told me."

"Send him away."

"Why?"

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"He may get hurt."

"If you injure one hair of his head, you'll rue it to your last day."

"Ah! You love him!"

"Don't touch me again, Donald," she said quietly.

"Touch you? Ah, and will he love you when he knows?"

Some invisible hand reached into her bosom and twisted her heart. It hurt. "I have not said I loved him. I am merely warning you to let him be."

"Don't be a fool, Di,"—with renewed patience. "I do not wish to hurt him. But there's no need of telling you that I'm not rustivating here for my health. Cranford is in the way. If you persuaded him to go at once . . ."

"What makes you think he would leave at a word from me?"

"He is flesh and blood. And you are a beautiful woman."

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"I shall say nothing."

"There's a long score against him. Well, well; if hurt comes to him, do not put all the blame on me. I'm not alone. The pater is in Kingston. If he had his way, Cranford would go out to sea, drifting. I told him I saw you."

"I hate him, hate him with every drop of blood in my body."

"Rotten old world! Do you really hate me?"

"I hate the life you lead."

"Never coming back?"

"Never! What, to that house, with its lies and knavery? No, no! For eighteen years I thought the world good and kind and brave. In one night that house. . . . Well, God forgive you all for that; I never shall. I am earning my own living, and my bread and butter tastes sweet."

"All right; I have warned you."

"And I shall not tell a brave man to run away from a set of rogues. You have nothing more to say?"

## THE PAST

“No.” He swung about abruptly; the shadows filled in behind him, and he was gone.

She never could tell how she got back to the farm. One of her knees throbbed painfully; for somewhere along the road she had stumbled and fallen. In bed she could not shut her eyes. The voice of the man had awakened the half-forgotten terrors of the past. The peace and serene happiness of the white-veiled convent, the beautiful gardens such as only Europe has had time to prepare and fulfil; and in her innocence she had dreamed that the world outside the huge iron gates was a fairy story, waiting to be read! Then, into the world, the great house with its paintings and rugs and tapestries and marble; the coming of young men, of middle-aged men, of old men, and the fever of card-play; her beautiful gowns and gems, and the vaguely growing wonder why the men never brought their wives with them. Came the thunderbolt. A young man, much in wine, had thrown his arms about her in the hall and

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kissed her; her indignation; his laughter; the terrible revelation.

“Oh, come now! Don't be a prude. Do you suppose we chaps would come here but for a chance to see you and talk with you? . . . God in heaven, you mean to tell me you do not know that this is a private gambling-house? . . . The low abominable scoundrels!”

She would always remember that young man kindly. His amorous attack had been but a sequence of perfectly logical deductions; and when he had learned the truth, he had had manhood enough to be ashamed, to leave the house and never more return.

From her varied wardrobes she had chosen the simplest hat and gown, taken only the money in her purse, and fled. It was almost as if she had fled with her hands to her ears and her eyes shut. The gradual disillusioning from which humanity draws its experience and profit was denied her. It had beaten down upon her with the suddenness of an avalanche. For days



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after there had been mental numbness ; dry-eyed and trance-like she had gone from place to place for work. God forgive them ; never would she.

Began the battle with the world. Warned, she learned quickly how to deal with men and half-men and beasts ; learned to hold them off at arm's length without repelling them, to meet rebuff with firmness and gentleness, harshness with patience, guile with disarming honesty. The fairy story she had dreamed of reading, there behind the convent grill, was a grim hag's tale. In these teeming six years many had been her occupations ; shop-girl, stenographer, nurse, governess, companion to old ladies, stewardess on the Atlantic liners, which she still followed ostensibly, but in reality as a blind for a more daring business.

And now the hurt she had always succeeded in eluding had finally come. Here in this quaint low-ceilinged room she faced it honestly. That a strong and wholesome body clothed a strong and wholesome soul was due to the fact that

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always she met issues without paltering. She cared more for this comparative stranger than was wise; and the issue was how to leave him, to forget him and make him forget in turn.

Half a chapter on pride. The good of it and the bad of it. The good of it that gives us the unwavering gaze, the kind yet fearless countenance, the assured step forward, that puts melody in the heart and harmony in the mind. The bad of it that makes us do a cruel or evil thing, to go on, shutting the ears of conscience against the call of justice and the sweeter voice of mercy. . . .

“ You sign your place and calling, in full seeming,  
With meekness and humility; but in your heart  
Is crammed with arrogance, spleen and pride.”

What hurt humans give themselves who lend their ears to the counsels of false pride! Fathers

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and sons, mothers and daughters, who hedge themselves with thorns which press inward.

Quarter after ten. Smead is playing solitaire, and pausing from time to time abstractedly; for here and there the face of a card dissolves and a vision comes instead. Cranford is smoking his pipe, and in the billows of pearly smoke, visions. In the hotel barroom the man who calls himself Hanchett has his visions. To the young sad-eyed woman in Watertown visions troop back and forth past her star-enameled window. Visions surge about the pillow of the young woman in the farmhouse. Quarter after ten.

A few hundred miles away, in the great city, an ancient clock in a hallway struck the quarter-hour. The soft boom of it penetrated all the lower rooms of the big house. By the library reading-table the gray-haired man laid down his newspaper and looked at his watch.

“Wonderful how that old clock keeps time,” he said to the white-haired woman opposite. “Hundred and fifty years old, and yet it keeps

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just as accurate time as this Swiss piece." He returned the watch to his pocket and was about to resume his reading when he saw something sparkle on the cheeks of the woman. "What's the matter, Jane?"

She dabbed at her cheeks with her handkerchief and fumbled the leaves of her book. "Nothing."

"Nonsense! That's not the truth. What's troubling you?"—kindly.

"That which is always troubling me,"—bravely, since she knew it must be said.

The man's features seemed to draw together, almost imperceptibly. The eyes narrowed, the nostrils; the lips became pinched. She could hear the long drawn breath. It was a way he had of keeping his temper in check. He squared the newspaper before his eyes. Suddenly she stretched an arm across the intervening space and touched his sleeve. He flung the newspaper to the floor and rose.

"Always thinking of her, always!"

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"I can't help it. She is flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood. I am her mother."

"And am I not her father?"

She smiled wanly. "That is not quite the same thing."

"You are without a stick of pride."

"No, no! I have pride; but it is the pride of pity, the pride of love. I can not crush out either at command from you. It is five years since you denied her."

"Ah!" He was one of those men whose faces grow white when angered. All the blood went with a rush to his heart, leaving his mind clear and cold. "I have told you never to mention her. I have no daughter."

"I have. And oh! I think of her at night. Where is she? Is she dead, alive, in misery? She, too, has pride, for she has never written but once."

"I tell you, I have no daughter."

"And I repeat, I have. And if I did not depend upon you for my bread and butter, I

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would seek and find her. In my heart I have never forsaken her."

"She is still more to you than I ever was."

"No; only since that day when you ceased to be the lover. Money and pomp and false pride have robbed me of both my daughter and my lover."

He sat down. "This seems to be a crisis, Jane." He spoke gently now.

"I want her."

"Listen. Was I the tyrant, the ogre? Did I ever deny her anything in reason? Did I not do my duty in laying all the facts before her and proving them?—that the man was a youthful blackleg, a gambler, a handsome scoundrel, the son of one of the greatest rascals in the state? God knows it was not that she had chosen as her lover a poor young man, honest. I know as well as you do that love is something we can not harness and drive. But in face of all these facts she ran away and married him. I have spoken. I disowned my daugh-

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ter the day she disowned me, for that's what she did ; and so long as I live she shall not enter this house. When I am dead and gone, you may do as you see fit with my money. I make no reservations."

"She may be hungry and cold."

"Am I to blame? Jane, you are wrong. Money has not made me a hard man; but it has given me something to think of. The girl's foolishness seemed to change my heart into stone. I have never said anything; but I know that you gave her your inheritance. It was yours to do with as you pleased. Doubtless she dumped it into his lap. Now listen. Rather than have this subject brought up again, I will meet you half-way. Find her, if you can; feed and clothe her if she is hungry and cold. For I am certain the scoundrel left her when he found that he could not get his crooked fingers into my wallet. But never let me hear her spoken of again in this house; never bring her to me, hoping that I shall forgive her. This is the last

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word from me on the subject." With this he left the room.

Quarter after ten. It tinkled from an ormolu clock which had once been Napoleon's. This house, but a few blocks removed from the other, would have been called a palace in Europe. It was filled with priceless treasures such as only these modern Aladdins may purchase. To the intelligent eye there was something more than the treasures themselves discernible in the atmosphere, in the arrangement, in the lack of jumble, which few millionaires escape who leave the filling of their mansions to collectors, more or less greedy. From the antique Ispahans on the floor to the ox-blood and peach-blow and Persian plaque on the walls, all had been collected, one by one, by the man who loved them. It was all he had left to do, all he had left to love. He was a very old man. The man in the first house and he knew nothing of each other's existence; they dwelt in worlds apart; yet their lives were definitely



## THE PAST

linked together. Together they had danced in the puppet-booth of pain to the wires of another man, who had emptied their houses of laughter and happiness. Quarter after ten.

The old man heard the message from Time. Under the study-lamp his head glimmered like new-minted silver. Slowly he laid down the faded photograph. He touched the hand-bell, and the liveried footman came in from the hall.

"Call up Mr. Simmons and tell him to come over."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell him it is a matter of life and death; that I urgently need him."

"Very well, sir."

The lawyer was almost as old as his client. His withered face was full of concern as, later by half an hour, the footman ushered him into the room.

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"No. At last everything is right. I've been a fool for thirty years, Simmons; a stub-

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born heartless fool. But I've found myself. I thought it was pride, but it was only anger which I was ashamed to confess."

The lawyer saw the old photograph. Instantly his thought went back to the beautiful child who had romped in these lordly silent rooms.

"I want to make a will to-night. Charities will have to come second. I want you to find out if Marguerite left any children."

The lawyer's eyes sparkled.

"I want you to find out. Go to that devil and ask him pointblank. I am very lonely. I want to see young people in this house before I die." He rang the bell again. "See if my private secretary is in. Tell him I want him to witness a legal transaction."

Simmons rubbed his dry hands, and the smile on his face wimpled his cheeks like wind on water. Should he tell him now? No. Surprise him; make the joy double. So he drew up a simple will; carried away with him

## THE PAST

a copy, and a lighter heart than he had known in years. A child of Marguerite's in that house!

Of the first man in this half-chapter, nothing more; of the very old man who had found himself, more anon.

Square away, then, for Pidgin Island, the thunder and cruel buffet of the wild surges: For a rajah's ransom hangs in the balance—and the kingdom of happiness.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE TEMPEST

**S**OME day I may tell you of another sort of fisherman's luck; of naked brown men who go down into the sea for shells, of furious drab monsters, of evil-smelling marts, of haggling and thieving and death, of merchants and Indian princes and money-lenders, of nut-brown throats and milk-white throats, of women who barter their souls and of men who throw away theirs—for nothing! But this is a fresh-water tale; and it is far more important to listen to Uncle Billy.

Thus, as he disengaged a pickerel from Diana's hook: "They ain't much better 'n snakes. Bums, I call 'em, who don't care 'f their names git in th' Sunday mornin' papers. But th' bass now, he's got self-respeck an' a fambly an' mebbe a good job; and *he* don't

## THE TEMPEST

want th' neighbors t' know he was out late an' mixin' with th' p'lice. No p'lice-court for his! Seems 's though we hadn't be'n fishin' for a month. Oh, we ain't so worse. There's Mr. Cranford in trouble; eel. I didn't think we'd see many bass in Sand Bay, after all that blow. S'pose we h'ist th' mudhook an' try Pidgin? Don't look jes' right 's I'd like it."

"I must go to Pidgin, Uncle Billy."

"Any reason y'd like t' tell me of?"—his hand on the fly-wheel.

It was craft on her part, swift calculation, and she knew that the old guide would credit it to womanly impulsiveness. "Uncle Billy, you're a good, brave, kindly man. I am going to put my secret in your hands. There is something on Pidgin Island I must get. Must! If you do not take me there you will break my heart. To-day, now; to-morrow will be too late. I know it looks bad, but I'm a good sailor, and I must take the chance. A hundred dollars if you will land me at Pidgin."

## PIDGIN ISLAND

This double appeal to his courage and his cupidity was irresistible.

“Do it fer nuthin’!”—knowing that he would be given the hundred just the same. “I guess we can git there ’thout any trouble,”—squinting at the north. “Sometimes that kind o’ sky is on’y a bluff.” He said this to reassure her. He would have made for Pidgin in the teeth of any reasonable gale; for Uncle Billy was mystery-loving, and the mystery which had been puzzling him since the first day they had fished Pidgin was about to be uncovered. Thus, her need had approached him from three different angles.

It was after three o’clock. From the wreck in Sand Bay to Pidgin was a question of minutes, twenty odd, at the most, half an hour; unless . . . Uncle Billy scratched his chin. Since he was going to Pidgin it was useless to look north any more. A hundred dollars.

“What’s on your mind, Lester?” asked Cranford.

## THE TEMPEST

"I don't like the looks of things, sir. We'd better get back into the river."

"Why, there's hardly a ripple."

"I know that; it's the feel I get once in a while. The ground-swell doesn't go down anything to speak of. They've been coming in all day. Early this morning the wind was blowing a little from the north. She was in the east when we started out." Lester wet a finger and held it up. "She's back in the north again. Shouldn't wonder . . ."

"Lester," said Cranford seriously. "I've simply got to go to Pidgin if Miss Wynne does. I saw a boat land there an hour or so ago. She's gone back to Kingston."

"Some one that's wise. Maybe, though, it was the lighthouse boat."

"Too fast. Hydroplane. I spotted her through the glass; caught a glimpse of her step as you call it. And anyhow, there goes Uncle Billy. All aboard!"

"All right, if you say so; but it's against my judgment."

## PIDGIN ISLAND

Long oily swells from the previous day's blow rolled impassively under the two boats. There had been no diminution to their size or regularity all that day; and because of this Lester worried. Everything was ready for a blow, no matter from what direction it might come. The sky was but a great drab bowl; lower, there were slate-blue clouds, with crisp outlines, and these moved swiftly southward. Air-currents above but none at water-level. The flowing hillocks came in from the southwest, smooth as a turtle's back. Somewhere above, war was brewing in the pot of the winds; like a true sailorman, Lester sensed it. It might hold off till night; it might blow over. When the wind, however light, veered from north to east and back to north, fitfully, it was a warning to keep one's weather-eye on the alert.

The distance between the two boats widened. By the time Uncle Billy was crossing the steamboat channel south of the spar-buoy, Lester's



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boat was just nosing outside of Long Point. Cranford, intent upon watching Diana, missed Lester's frown of perplexity. Cranford was determined not to lose sight of the woman he loved. Pidgin Island might be the key, but something told him that Diana knew what it unlocked. He wanted this fog cleared up; wanted to learn where she stood in this tangle. That she was against the Smead cohorts he did not for one minute doubt. But what had she learned? What was going to be found on yonder jumble? Why was she working alone? To what end? He had told her what his occupation was; why did she refuse to confide in him, use his knowledge? At shore-dinner that noon he had given her every opportunity to do so, and she had evaded him with the skill of a fencer. His success as a secret agent was not only due to his intelligence but to his infinite patience as well. He would outwait her. And where was the scoundrel of a husband all this time! He lost sight of the gray

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panorama, the tossing boat beyond: that handsome face with the scarred chin. A cold air, like that which sweeps over ice-fields, entered his heart. Was he the man?

His cogitations were rudely broken in upon. He saw Lester stand up, lean against the tiller-rope, and the boat careened in an abrupt half-circle.

“What’s up?”

“Look at Reed’s Bay! We’ve got to get out of here, quick!”

Cranford stared northward, his lips parted. One of those inexplicably sudden squalls from the north was coming out of Reed’s; small angry whitecaps topping waves as green as malachite. With the old turtle backs coming in from the southwest and this counter-blow from the north came evil presage. The squall might go down as suddenly as it had risen; it might be the vanguard of a tempest. . . .

“Lester, there’s a woman in Billy’s boat, and they are headed for Pidgin.”

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“Billy’s crazy!” shouted Lester.

The squall struck; the air was bitter cold.

“Lester, when they turn back, you turn back, but not till then.”

“I tell you, Mr. Cranford, this is a bad hole to be in. Time to get out. I know what I’m talking about.”

“No doubt of it, Lester; but there’s a woman out there.”

“All right.”

The boat came about sturdily. Calmly Lester took the life-belt from under his rowing-seat and buckled it on. Cranford followed his example. The real danger lay not in heading for Pidgin, but in trying to land or leave. The tempest—for there was now no doubt in the mind of either man that this squall was backed by sterner stuff—would drive them without particularly grave danger; but to stop and turn in the middle distance was a matter of life and death. A blow like this in the morning never finished the day; but when the

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god of winds blew his pipes in the afternoon, snug harbors for mankind. It is four miles from Long Point to Pidgin. About a mile out the squall became tempest in fact. It seemed to Cranford that all the wind of the last three days had struck a wall somewhere up north and had rebounded in one blast. If the wind was cold, the water was warm, and that minimized the discomforts of a continual deluge.

“Take the ropes!” cried Lester, stepping back into the stern with Cranford. “I’ll watch her and meet ’em as they come.” He knelt, with a hand on the battery-switch. “If Bill monkeys with his engine, God knows what’ll happen, the danged fool! What’s he thinking of? We can’t land and we won’t be able to get away. We’re in a fine hole. We can’t go back now. But you wait; we’ll be kindling-wood before night.” And Lester was something of a prophet.

There was but one chance; Cranford appreciated this as well as Lester; and this chance

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was the shallowness of the water in front of the dock and the boat-house. This is not to infer that the boats themselves would benefit by this chance. Nothing of the sort. To anchor them twenty or thirty feet out and trust to luck and strength of the cables, that was their hope of salvation. As for their occupants, they would have to slip over the sides and wade in, water chest-high, at the mercy of the buffeting surges which would be flying over the shoal. Hazards. Lucky for them if nothing came more serious than bruises and aches.

The deep-sea sailor looks scornfully upon his fresh-water cousin. Very well; call him a landlubber, mock him. But between a typhoon in the Yellow Sea, a hurricane off the "roaring forties" and a norther on the Great Lakes there's nothing but Hobson's choice.

The two boats were now riding a choppy boiling sea. The swells lifted them—visually they had disappeared—and the north waves

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battered and smashed against their quarters, growing in height each moment. The wind sang like an orchestra of bassoons. It was useless to talk. Uncle Billy had steadied down to half-power, praying under his stubbly mustache as he had never prayed before that the engine would not break down, "go back on him." To him a hundred dollars was a large sum, a third of what he made all summer, with steady work; but as the shaft of the light on Pidgin grew clearer and nearer, the value of a hundred dollars diminished proportionately. Gladly would he have turned back, gladly would he have given a hundred to be snug in Grimshaw's, the lee side of Wolfe Island. But behind him was the resolute will of a woman, grown suddenly strange and not understandable. There was no fear on her face; somehow it looked lean and lioness-like. He wished that his tiller-rope was hemp instead of cotton. That Lester was grimly tagging on behind was his only consolation. Two boats in a gale were always safer than one.

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He turned and bawled against the wind:  
“ I’m a thunderin’, tarnation fool, Miss Wynne.  
I’m old ’nough t’ know better. I’m riskin’  
your life ’n’ my own. That hundred foozled  
me. ’F they’s anythin’ on that danged island  
wuth stackin’ our lives against, I’d like t’ know  
whut it is.”

“ A rajah’s ransom, Uncle Billy. And I am  
trying to prevent a crime.”

“ Well, I’m committin’ one bringin’ y’ out  
here. A livin’ gale, a livin’ gale!”

A comber broke and seethed over the stern.  
The spray blinded the girl and partly strangled  
her. She tucked the rain-coat snugger about  
her knees and feet. Wisely, she had not put it  
over her head and shoulders. If there came a  
spill she wanted free-play; she was a good  
swimmer; and the life-belt would hold her up  
if she tired. Once she looked back over her  
shoulder. A warm little thrill ran over her.  
He was following, following. She was at  
once glad and worried. Glad that he should  
wish to share her danger, worried for fear he

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might find out what desperate need had made her tempt fate. In some manner she must trick him, shabbily trick him. No taint of dishonor, such as it was, must be his. For her there was none; she was simply righting a wrong. If he learned the truth he would step aside, smother his conscience; for her sake he would ignore his oath-bound duty. So many times had the truth cried at her lips; so many times she had resolutely shut her jaws. Tomorrow she would write it all, ask forgiveness and vanish. She was obsessed with the idea of leaving him suddenly and never seeing him again. Ah, if he only knew!

For three years now she had been engaged in government work identical to his; only, she had posed as a stewardess, not as a person of leisure. To right a wrong, almost personal, she had elected to betray just once the office which fed and clothed her generously. Vaguely in her work she had heard of Cranford; a word dropped incautiously here and there by high



## THE TEMPEST

officials. Thus, that day—she would always remember it!—in Uncle Billy's boat-house, the introduction had struck terror to her heart. For a few days she believed that he was here for the same purpose as she; but his frank confession, the address of his valet in case harm befell him, together with the avowal that he loved her, convinced her that he suspected nothing, that he had really come a-fishing.

Ah, this miserable business! She had not dared to put it off till the morrow. She had seen the hydroplane arrive and depart. Storm or no storm, the time to act was now. While she had effectually blocked telegraphic communications, there was no way of stopping the arrival of a letter in the morning.

A sudden silence, a cessation of vibration; she came back to actualities. The dreaded thing had happened. The engine had stopped. Now for the real battle between humanity and the elements.

Uncle Billy, quick to appreciate that this was

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no time to tinker, slung out his starboard oar and pulled with both hands. Fortunately, the mishap took place after they had made the shoal. It required quick work with the oar to get the boat back in line with the light. Still pulling with his left hand, he pawed back of him for the three-pronged anchor. He shipped the oar, heaved the iron, and made fast. For a minute or two they dragged; then some friendly rock offered purchase, and the boat came about with her bow head-on to the wind. They were safe for a time.

Lester crept nearer and nearer. Uncle Billy was perhaps three hundred yards from the dock. Lester could tow him in as far as he deemed necessary to go. There was no possible chance of making a landing with the boats. The surge as it struck the dock and the boat-house runway flung upward, from ten to fifteen feet, tons of water, sand and gravel. The current was very powerful besides.

“ I guess I’ve gone ’n’ done it, Miss Wynne,”

## THE TEMPEST

said Uncle Billy, rubbing his bleeding knuckles. "I'll never be able t' look th' folks in th' face again. Fer thutty year I ain't never took no risks. I never see it blow worse 'n this. Know whut we got t' do?"

"Yes. When we get near enough, drop over and swim or wade in."

"See whut they're doin'?"—pointing to the huge combers racing past and flinging themselves like ravening wolves against the island. "Miss Wynne, this is no time fer foolin'. Plain talk. We'll never git ashore 'thout one o' us gittin' hurt. I'll never fergive myself fer lettin' a hundred dollars git me int' this hole. You're a strange young woman. Y've made me do sumpin no man on earth could do. Four lives depend on level heads, miss. Y' ain't afraid?"

"No, Uncle Billy. I'm only sorry for all this trouble."

"Well, 'f you ain't afraid we got a chance. A scared woman's worse 'n a hoss in a barn

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afire. When y' strike out, head a few points t' th' west. That'll keep y' from bein' slammed against th' dock. They break jes' 's big on th' runway, on'y they can't slam y' so hard. Y' got t' fight it out yourself. Nobuddy can help anybuddy else in there. Keep th' head clear 'n' plug. We three men'll git y' in somehow. But I had no business comin', hundred 'r no hundred. I'm crazy. My ol' bones told me a rampage was loosenin' up. It ain't on'y gittin' on that blasted island, miss, but it's stayin' there all night, an' mebbe losin' both boats. An' 'f you git hurt . . ."

"Don't worry about me, Uncle Billy. I'm all right. I have seen worse storms than this. Every one for himself; there must be no worrying about me; no foolish sentiment because I'm a woman."

Billy watched the new hemp cable. It was lucky he had brought that. If the old mud-hook held, the *Navarre* would come out of it scot-free.

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"I hope your wife will not worry."

"I've told her never t' worry till twenty-four hours after I'm missin'. They'll know where we are; they call us th' Pidgins. What's worryin' me is this here cable. It's got t' hold all night, an' these motor-boats ain't 's easy ridin' 's skiffs. Mebbe when I wake up in th' mornin', th' ol' *Navarre*'ll be nosin' int' Henderson's Harbor, 'f she don't baste her brains out somewhere between here 'n' there. All right; I'm t' blame. I've let a hundred dollars foozle me. An' I've dragged Mr. Cranford 'n' Lester int' it, too. By jings! they've seen us."

Coming out of the dwelling was the light-keeper himself, arrayed in sou'-wester, rubber-coat and rubber-boots. He carried a heavy coil of rope on his arm. He stopped at the side of the boat-house, calmly smoking his corn-cob. There was no use of his wasting his breath, of shouting advice. All he could do was to wait and lend a hand when the time

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came. Fools, all of them that came out here to fish.

“Stand by for the cable!” shouted Lester, who was now within reach.

“Wait till I git th’ anchor up!” More trouble. It required fully ten minutes’ maneuvering to loosen the mudhook.

“All right, Lester!”

It was Diana who spoke. She stood up. Lester heaved the water-soaked cable and fell short. Hand over hand it went back. All the while the boats were drifting off. If Lester’s engine refused to work it meant hunger and cold and mayhap death; for they would be blown out into the lake.

“Ready?”

“Throw it!”

This time she caught it; knelt and wound it about the forward seat. She choked back a little sob as she heard the putt-putt of the loyal little engine in the other boat. Slowly they came back to the shoal and headed for the dock.

## THE TEMPEST

Thirty feet off shore, Lester held up his hand, and both anchors went over. A short drag followed.

Without a word—indeed, Uncle Billy said afterward that she smiled at him—Diana slipped over the side and struck out for the runway. One after another the men followed in after her. Up, up and then forward with almost incredible swiftness, as if some invisible hand was flinging them; into a smother of foam, and down, down till their feet touched the boulders; and up again and down again, playthings. Than plunging water, nothing else more quickly robs the human body of its vitality; the dragging weight of it, the inability to breathe, make for immediate exhaustion.

Lester was first to catch the light-keeper's line. He knew that the latter would need help. He made the landing with but slight bruising. Together they pulled in Uncle Billy.

“Keep back, Diana!” warned Cranford.  
“Wait till I reach the foot of the runway.”

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She smiled at him bravely. She was growing weak. She caught the line just as a comber smothered down over her.

“Now!” she heard Cranford cry out.

But when they began to pull, her body seemed too heavy for her numb arms, and she let go.

Desperately Cranford fought to her side with the line. He was himself half drowned in his endeavor to tie the line about her waist. He succeeded, but the effort cost him about all his strength.

“Haul away!”

She was literally dragged ashore. Surge after surge crashed upon her. The men lifted her to her feet. She pressed them aside and turned to look for Cranford. It was an unfortunate movement. A comber, vaster than all which had gone before, rose and dashed against her, throwing her down against the runway where she lay motionless.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### TREASURE

UNCLE BILLY stepped outside the boat-house, cautiously. Above him, the great brilliant shaft of light turned slowly; aside from the beam all the world was black, that intense night-black which has the feel of oppression in it, makes you put out your hands instinctively and grope. The wind blew with a tremendous humming noise, like some huge dynamo, which indeed it was; and the water ran as high as when, five hours ago, they had all been dragged ashore, bruised, cut, exhausted. Occasionally, some comber leaped so high that the revolving light touched it, and in that instant it seemed to stand still in the air, vividly, after the manner of objects seen in lightning flashes.

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The guide squatted on his haunches and peered out. By and by his eyes began to absorb what light there was, and he saw two faint gray patches on the water, bowing and kowtowing to each other like quadrille dancers. The boats were still there. Would the cables hold till morning! All he had in worldly possessions, aside from his home, was that boat; it was his bread and butter; without it (and at present no means of buying another) he might have to mortgage the home next year. He got up painfully and limped off toward the tower. There wasn't any sense of Lester standing watch up there. Either the cables would hold or they wouldn't, and watching was only prolonging the agony. All this because he had let the thought of making a hundred dollars dazzle his eyes and obscure his usual caution and common sense. He refused to admit that the girl and the mystery surrounding her had pulled him as strongly as the thought of gain.

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He paused and reached down to rub his shin gently. In helping Cranford in, he had fallen on the slippery runway and smashed a shin against one of the rolling-pins. Well, the poor young woman was paying for her hardihood: a gash two inches long on the side of her head and an arm strained so badly that her fingers spread out crookedly. And she lay there on the floor of the boat-house without movement, without speech, too exhausted to moan against the pain of her injuries. Treasure?

He was in a fine mood for treasure. He would have liked nothing better than to find it and cast it into the lake, to let it remain there till the Second Deluge (which the minister said last Sunday was on the way), and ever after. Treasure? What treasure? How could there be any treasure on Pidgin? The adventure itself did not stir his imagination; they were all alive on shore; but he had broken faith with himself, and there lay the sting and the bite. Known for years as the most careful

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guide on the river, and to smash that record into smithereens in a moment of mental aberration! Mental aberration was not Uncle Billy's expression, only its politer equivalent; for, upon occasion, there was not a dock-hand between Quebec and Buffalo who could express himself more fluently in deep-sea vituperation. But he was a just man, was Uncle Billy. The blame of this rested upon his shoulders.

Perhaps the real backbone of his dissatisfaction over his conduct was the fact that he had now given the missus the chance for which she had been waiting for years. She wasn't a scold, but she would not have upheld the traditions of her sex if she had refused to seize upon this weakness, to enlarge upon it, to fling it in his face from now on, all through the dreary long winter to come.

Inside the boat-house Cranford sat with his back to the light-keeper's boat, asleep.

A smoky lantern hung from the roof beam. Between this and the other lantern, which stood

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on the floor, a little way from Diana's head, swam a pale haze, tainted with the odor of kerosene. From time to time a dark tongue of water would suddenly come in under the double doors, to seep lazily out again. The bolts rattled continuously.

Diana lay between the boat and the partition. A blanket was spread over her; under her bandaged head were two cushions over and down which her loosened hair flowed, spun-bronze in the light so close to it. Her face, thrown into relief, had the rare mellow tone of a Velasquez portrait.

When she fell on the runway she struck against a bolt. Fortunately the blow was glancing; still, it laid open the side of her head as neatly as a knife would have done. How serious this injury was Cranford was unable to determine; but the peculiar twist to the arm, as they picked her up and carried her into the boat-house, senseless, alarmed him. He had been on too many a football field not to have

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learned that often a strain is far more dangerous than a clean broken bone. Wild though he was with anxiety, he went to work coolly. Billy and Lester were worse than useless in this emergency. Off went her heavy outing-coat. He found it necessary to cut away the sleeve of her sweater; and he was glad she had worn that; for wool, even if wet, absorbs and retains heat. The cut bled profusely, and this he stopped with applications of cold water, ripping up a pillow-case for bandages. Next he gave his attention to the arm. No bones were broken. He bound it tightly to keep down the swelling, soaked it with arnica which, happily, the light-keeper was able to supply, and slung it across her breast. All this time she remained unconscious. He drew the stool beside her and settled down to watch. An hour or so later she opened her eyes.

“What has happened?” she asked faintly.

“You fell and badly strained your arm. And there’s a cut on the side of your head.

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Now, please! Don't talk; keep perfectly quiet; I'm going to pull you out of this all right. The blow will go down by midnight, and early to-morrow we'll make for home. Try to sleep."

"A drink."

A strong cup of coffee was given her forthwith. She drank it greedily, but refused the buttered bread, and lay back, closing her eyes. She was so far gone in exhaustion that Cranford knew the coffee would have no other effect than to hold off hunger-weakness. Himself, he ate three slices of bread and drank three cups of coffee, for he was dead-tired, and yet he must watch.

Her head throbbed so that it neutralized the pain in her arm. She kept her eyes shut, not so much to urge sleep as to avoid watching the roof revolve and the four sides of the boat-house expand and contract. And Cranford had so many pale, care-worn faces! Truth was, a bit of delirium had possession of her. How grotesque he looked, with a halo above

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his head and another under his chin!—the effect of the contra-lights of the lantern. . . What was it she had forgotten? What was it she ought to be doing? Why had she fallen? What had really happened? But even as she tried to pierce the fog which seemed to oppress her, sleep “soft-footed as the snow” fell upon her. She slept for four hours. When she awoke it was with clear recollection. She saw Cranford, sleeping with his mouth open, most unheroic, his arms dangling at his sides. She knew now what she had to do. She must rise without disturbing him, steal out. . . O the pain and misery of it! She fell back groaning. Brave and stoical she was, but there are some pains which wrench the cry out of us, stifle it how we try.

Instantly Cranford was awake. “What is it?”

“My ankle!”

“Which one?”

“The right.” She set her teeth in her lips.



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Off went the shoe.

“No, no!”

But he gave no heed to her protest. He bound the stockinged foot and saturated it with what arnica remained in the bottle. He saw the tears running down her cheeks, but he did not know the real cause of them.

“Diana, Diana!—what can I do, what can I do? Poor girl, poor girl!”

Tender and sensitive, he hated the sight of pain; and to see it twist the lips of the woman he loved was doubly maddening.

“That’s better. I’m all right now. Thank you!”

But her thought was: she had failed, failed miserably, after all these weeks of careful planning; failed. She could not stand, let alone walk; there was as much misery in her body as in her mind. Either she must tell him or let everything go. Why had fate brought him here? It was cruel. If only he had not followed!

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Outside, under the light, Uncle Billy was putting questions to the light-keeper.

"No. Nobody left anything with me," said the latter, shifting his corn-cob. "A hydro-plane stopped here for an hour or so, cooked shore-dinner, and got out. Sensible, I call 'em. They didn't leave anything with me. One o' the men limped. But I wasn't watching 'em close."

Uncle Billy sighed. All for nothing!

"Why do you want t' know?" asked the light-keeper. His curiosity was negligent. He was not much interested in the doings of guides and folks who wasted their time fishing.

"Oh, nuthin'. Miss Wynne was expectin' sumpin. That's why we made th' island. Thought mebbe they'd left it t' you."

"Nope. How's the young lady?"

"I dunno,"—wearily.

"Pack o' fools, all of you. You've been fishing Pidgin thirty years, and it was time you learned you can't fish here in safety. Ain't

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there just as many bass on your side o' the line?"

"That you, Lester?"

"Uhuh!"

"Think they'll hold?"

"Don't know,"—gruffly. "It'll cost Mr. Cranford about four hundred dollars if anything happens to my boat. I was against making the island."

"I reckon Mr. Cranford 'll do whut's square. Money don't worry him none. We better turn in. Good night," said Uncle Billy to the light-keeper.

"Good night. There ain't anything more I can do for you?"

"Nope."

The two guides walked back to the boat-house and entered noiselessly. Without ado they stretched themselves out on a dry spot by the doors and in a minute or two were fast asleep. Poor they were, and mayhap always would be; but Providence had given them a

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compensation: they could always lie down and go to sleep.

Cranford was a light sleeper. The entry of the guides, quiet as it was, served to awaken him. He peered down at the face of the girl. Sound asleep; at least she looked so. He breathed a prayer of thanks. Silently and reverently he knelt, lifted a strand of hair and kissed it. Her breath came deeply and regularly. If she lay still like this till morning she would recover a good part of her natural strength.

“Poor girl!” he murmured.

Her lips stirred. “Donald!”

A knife-thrust from her hand could not have hurt him more grievously. He stood up straight, rumpling his hair, a habit he had of doing when deeply agitated. So Donald was his name? Donald, Donald—Donald Hanchett! He remembered now of having seen the name in full on the hotel register; Donald Hanchett, some kind of lieutenant to that hulking rascal



He lifted a strand of hair and kissed it



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Smead. For a moment Cranford heartily wished he had not made the landing, that he had gone out where there was neither trouble nor disappointment. That she was married he had begun to accept as a fact for which, so far as he was concerned, there was no remedy. Friends. He was an honorable man; he could still love her and be her friend, for he realized that she might need one. But this new coil rather swept his feet from under him, like the angry currents flowing over the shoal. To a rogue; married to a rogue. The thought was more bitter than death. She had been fooled, deceived by a handsome rogue. And she still thought enough of him to speak his name in her dreams! His fingers continued to plow through his hair, which presently stood on end in all directions. Life was life, the bitter mingled with the sweet, and only the coward backed away from the issues. Brooding would do no good; being sorry for himself was only a beggar's self-inflicted wound. He would re-

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turn to New York at once, get back into harness: work was the balm for any hurt. Out of this mystery and fog, to forget if he could.

He saw her outing-coat hanging from a nail. Lightly he stepped over the sleeping girl and reached for the coat. It was still heavy with water. He ought to have turned the pockets when he hung it up; the coat would have been half dry by now. He regained his stool and carefully drew out pocket after pocket. He laid the handkerchief and the gloves on the gunwale of the boat. Smiling suddenly he took the gloves, folded them, wet as they were, and put them into a pocket of his own. He returned to the work. As he pulled out the inside pocket a water-soaked envelope fell out. He stooped for it. Mystery and fog were no more. There was no need to see the contents of that peculiar style of envelope. He had received many of them, postmarked but stampless, official business of the United States Customs!



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Uncle Billy was up and outside long before sunrise. The water was flat, the sky cloudless save in the low east, and not a breath of air was astir. Thus the great emotions of nature come and go. Only one boat rode the shallow waters of the shoal—his own. Lester's was gone. He ran down to the dock. There it was, in four feet of water, her bow split like a pistachio-nut. He had left Lester sound in slumber, and he rather hated the task of awaking him and announcing the misfortune. She had broken her cable some time during the night and had pounded her nose against the dock till she had split open. No patching would ever rehabilitate the boat, but her engine might be saved; and engines were the things that cost. All guides on the river were first-class boat-builders; Lester would have to buy nothing but material. Good old *Navarre*! She had ridden the storm without a scratch.

He did not return to the boat-house but wandered aimlessly past the light. Lester's

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oars were gone ; by this time they were far out into the lake. He saw the remains of a recent fire, a shore-dinner fire ; one he was certain neither he nor Lester had built. This was a cobble-range, while he and Lester had portable stoves.

“ By jings ! whut d’ y’ know ’bout that ? ” he ejaculated. Behind the pink granite boulder lay two Bristol rods in their gray cotton casings. “ Somebody’s be’n fishin’ ’n’ got out in a hurry. Well, well ; findin’s ’s keepin’s. Bristols ’r’ always handy in these parts. Luck’s with your Uncle Billy.”

He tucked the rods under his arm and went back to the dock. It was growing lighter and lighter. In the east the Roman scarves were becoming brilliant. Uncle Billy laid down his find, took off his clothes and boldly waded into the water. Might as well get the boat in now as later. There was a good deal of water in her, but that was due to rain. For an old hand

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like himself it would be easy for him to tow her in and snug her up at the foot of the runway. Here and there a swirl on the surface of the water attracted him. The bass were playing. He tugged in the boat; and the sun was up by the time he had cleaned her, bow to stern, set the cushions out to dry, and put the new-found Bristols in the "pantry," as he called the extra fish-box on the port-side. He put on his clothes, ready for breakfast.

Lester came out, rubbing his eyes. At a glance he saw what had happened.

"Four foot o' water, jes' beyond th' dock," explained Uncle Billy. "Engine'll be all right, but th' boat's gone t' glory. Y'll haff t' build this winter. Them two sleepin' yet?"

"Yes; they're still sleeping," answered Lester moodily. He had loved that old boat as another man might have loved a dog. For seven years it had been his faithful servant.

"I'll help y' when it come t' buildin', seein' 's

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how I'm t' blame. But, Lester, sumpin I ain't told y' yet. She offered me a hundred dollars t' make Pidgin."

"A hundred dollars? Lord's name, what for?"

"I can't tell y' that. But don't you worry none. Mr. Cranford 'll see that y' don't lose nuthin'. I know him. But I'm worried 'bout Miss Wynne. She's hurt. But when a plucky woman's hurt, she don't holler, 'n' so y' can't tell how bad she is hurt. It ain't goin' t' be no fun gittin' her back t' th' farm. Th' sooner we start, th' better. 'F we start right away we'll make th' farm by nine 'r so."

"I'll have to stay and get the engine out and soak her in kerosene. Come back for me this afternoon, or have the bait-boat come for me."

"All right. I'll do th' square thing 'n' divide that hundred."

"Coffee an' eggs in half an hour, if you want 'em," sang the light-keeper from his doorway.

## TREASURE

“Good for you.”

At seven-thirty Uncle Billy, Cranford and Diana were homeward-bound. They had taken out the middle-seat so that she could lie at a comfortable angle. Her head no longer throbbed, but her arm and ankle caused her exquisite misery. So she kept absolutely quiet; and Cranford had tact enough not to ply her with questions, though the temptation was almost irresistible. In the secret service like himself, and playing her woman's hand alone against as accomplished a band of rogues as ever set the Atlantic ports by the ears! . . . and one of them her husband!

Her quietness was as much due to resignation as anything else. She was firm in the intention not to drag Cranford into these quicksands of cross-purpose and treachery and dishonor. If it had been an ordinary case, impersonal, she would have confided in him at the beginning. But it was not ordinary, it was terribly personal, and he must never, never

## PIDGIN ISLAND

know what lay back of it all. If she told him anything it must be all; and oh! she did not want him to go away, thankful for his escape; she wanted always to remain the subtle mystery, sometimes to enchain his thought in the dim future. Ah, why had she not died in the kindly convent, with all her beautiful illusions?

They reached the farm at nine. The two men made a hand-chair for her and carried her into the parlor, and laid her on the sofa.

"My, Miss Wynne!" said Uncle Billy amiably, "but you ain't no fairy."

She laughed.

"She's a goddess, Billy," said Cranford.

She smiled.

Here the landlady bustled the men into the hall. Miss Wynne must be put to bed at once. They had had slender hope of ever seeing her again. It had been a terrible storm; half a dozen old monarchs among the maples had been laid low. Half an hour later she opened the door.

"You can come in now, but only for a

## TREASURE

moment. Billy, Miss Wynne wants you to send this telegram right away." She gave the guide a sealed envelope. "The operator is to open it."

"Have her off 'n an hour," declared Uncle Billy happily. Everything was going to turn out right. While Cranford was engaged in telling the adventure to the landlady, Billy took the opportunity to stoop and whisper to Diana: "They wa'n't nuthin' on th' pesky island. Th' light-keeper said they left nuthin', 'n' I looked too. They ain't brung it yet." His idea of treasure was indissolubly linked with oak-chests or iron-boxes. "Jes' you don't worry."

"I shall be out this evening," said Cranford, approaching the sofa. "I'm going to send for the best surgeon in Watertown. I don't like the looks of those fingers."

"You've been very good to me. I'd never have made the landing but for you. You must be dead. Go back and sleep all day, Mr. Cranford; then come."

"All my good friends call me Cran."

## PIDGIN ISLAND

“Cran,”—shyly. To call him Mr. Cranford after all that had happened sounded formal and ungracious; to call him John was awkward and stilted. Cran. There was a delightful camaraderie about that half-name; it was intimate without being sentimental.

Clumsily he touched and pressed her uninjured hand and went out, followed by the guide. They got into the boat and proceeded to the village, full speed.

“Cran,” murmured the girl, her gaze reaching beyond the pines outside the window, even beyond the fair blue sky. A man; strong-bodied, clean in the mind, tender and gentle and boyish. Oh, the happy woman who would some day find and possess him and call him all her own!

“I got t’ go t’ th’ telegraph office, Mr. Cranford.”

“And hurry. Do an errand for me. I’m all in. Wire for the best surgeon in Watertown; tell him to come by auto at once; never



## TREASURE

mind trains. You'll be going out after Lester? Poor chap; but I'll see that he loses nothing."

"Go 'f it don't blow."

Cranford went to bed and stayed there till after five.

At the telegraph office the operator, upon being told who was sending the message, took scrupulous care in transmitting the correct rendition of the ten Italian words. More than that, he made Watertown repeat back the message, letter for letter. Neither he nor Watertown understood Italian; but the young woman in black understood, wept silently, packed her suit-case, and left Watertown on the noon train.

That night the doctor informed Cranford that Miss Wynne was asleep and must not be disturbed. He added that orders were that she should be kept in bed or the steamer-chair for three or four days. Neither the sprained ankle nor the cut was serious; but the arm was in a bad way, and unless she obeyed his instructions

## PIDGIN ISLAND

to the letter, she might never be able to straighten out her fingers again.

“ Shall I take you back to the village? I am returning.”

“ No, thanks,” said Cranford; “ I’ll walk.”

And walk he did, and disappear, and leave nothing but his hat in the road as a memento of an exceptionally exciting struggle.

## CHAPTER XV

### A NOVEL PRISON

**L**ESTER appeared as usual the next morning. He had borrowed the boat of an unemployed guide, and was ready for the day's work. Eight o'clock came, but no fisherman. At half after eight Lester went up to the hotel office and inquired. Mr. Cranford had left no order for lunch or shore-dinner, and he had not been down to breakfast; had overslept, perhaps. But when an hour went down the clock, Lester began to think that maybe Mr. Cranford was ill. So he left the rocking-chair on the veranda and sought the clerk again. So ardent a fisherman as Mr. Cranford was not likely to permit an exploit, such as a night out at Pidgin, to interfere with the sport, especially on a day as calm and beautiful as this one was.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

"Maybe he isn't well this morning," he suggested to the clerk.

"Go and wake him up," advised the clerk.

"All right."

There was no response to his knocking; gentle at first, then firmly, then irritably. No answer. He returned to the office, thoughtfully.

"He doesn't answer."

"Try the door?"

"Yes."

As an afterthought the clerk looked into the key-box. "Why, here's his key! He's gone out."

"Not this morning," replied Lester confidently. "If he went out he'd have come around to the dock to let me know. He told me to be here at seven-thirty as usual. That's all of two hours ago. Suppose you go up and open the door?"

"Come along."

The clerk rapped soundly on the door and waited for a moment. Then he called Cran-

## A NOVEL PRISON

ford by name. Hearing nothing, he inserted the key and opened the door. He stood transfixed on the threshold, and Lester stared over his shoulder, eyes apop. The bureau-drawers, the drawers of the wash-stand, the suit-cases—emptied and flung carelessly aside! The mattress lay twisted over the footboard of the bed, the pillows crushed, clothes littered the chairs and the floor. A norther and a sou'-wester combined could not have created more confusion.

Lester was first to move. He pushed aside the clerk, rain into the room and looked under the bed. Then he peered into the clothes-press. He shook his head.

“He isn't here. Something's happened. Mr. Cranford was never in any such hurry as this. Who occupies the other rooms?”

“All the other rooms in this corridor are empty. The only other rooms occupied are in the north wing, over the kitchens. He went out to the farm last night.”

## PIDGIN ISLAND

"The farm?"

"Perhaps he stayed there all night."

"But who's been in his room, hunting for something?"

"Hanged if I know. I can't figure it out. There must have been a racket, to do all this damage. And yet, nobody heard anything last night, or they'd have reported it. Better run out to the farm. Maybe it's a second-story robbery. If he didn't stay out at the farm, I'll notify the sheriff."

"Mr. Cranford is one of the best guests this hotel ever had. He's been here off and on for twenty years. I'll hunt up Uncle Billy. Maybe he can tell something."

"Do it," said the clerk, locking the door. "I'll tell the maid not to touch anything. And if Mr. Cranford isn't out there, I'll call in the sheriff."

"He won't do any good. Get a detective from Watertown. I'm going down to Bill's."

At the house he was informed that he would

## A NOVEL PRISON

find the old guide in the boat-house. There Lester found him seated on the soap-box, gravely inspecting a felt-hat which he held in his hands.

“Billy, where’s Mr. Cranford?”

“I dunno, Lester. I found this hat o’ his’n in th’ middle o’ th’ road ’s I started out t’ th’ farm this mornin’. Whut’s his hat doin’ in th’ road? Huh?”

“Did you go to the farm?”

“Yes; but he wa’n’t there. He left there ’bout eight las’ night. Why?”

“Wasn’t in his room last night, Billy; but some one else was. Everything turned upside down.”

“Y’ don’t say so! Whut’ll we do?”

“I don’t know what to do. There’s something wrong about this.”

“Everythin’ upside down in his room, huh? Why, he’s a reg’lar old maid ’bout keepin’ his things ’n order.” Uncle Billy got up slowly. Suddenly he shook th hat in the air. “I

## PIDGIN ISLAND

know! Sumpin t' do 'th that dinged hundred dollars, 'r my name ain't Bill. I'll go out 'n' ask Miss Wynne."

"I wouldn't. If she's sick-abled it might upset her. Billy, what did Miss Wynne expect to find out there at Pidgin?"

"Honestly, Lester, I don't know,"—drawling his words to make them emphatic. "I'll tell y' this much: she said sumpin 'bout preventin' a crime 'n' a rajah's ransom. What's a rajah; huh?"

"It's a Hindu king, I guess."

"I remember; one o' them nigger chaps that wears silk pants 'n' a bedspread fer a hat. But I don't see whut a rajah's got t' do 'th Mr. Cranford's disappearin'. Y' leave it t' me, Lester. I'll go back t' where I found that hat, 'n' nose 'bout."

"The hotel people are going to send to Watertown for a detective."

"Let 'em. I got jes' 's good nose 'n' eyes 's any detective." He rinned the hat into his



## A NOVEL PRISON

pocket and strode out of the boat-house, followed by Lester, who was anxious and solemn. "Don't y' say nuthin' t' th' hotel folks 'r th' boys. Wait a day 'r two. Mebbe Cranford was runnin' after some one 'n' lost his hat."

"Wouldn't be running all this while."

"Well, y' leave it t' me. I wa'n't thinkin' much when I picked up th' hat. I'm goin' out there t' see whut did happen."

"All right, Billy. There's something crooked to this. This is a peaceful village, and we don't cut up this kind of jokes on anybody."

It is doubtful if Uncle Billy had ever read a novel, much less a detective story; but he knew all the earth-signs. He was a guide to the manner born; he could read the sky, the face of the waters, the earth. He could not have told you how or why, but the fact remained that the gift was his. He had gone out early that morning to inquire after Miss Wynne's health. Fortunately, he had walked; for the engine of the *Navarre* needed overhauling—as usual. When

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he picked up Cranford's hat his mind was occupied with the girl's grim earnestness out there at Pidgin, the hundred dollars; he had not, therefore, observed things. But now he had reason.

He found the spot and studied the ground thoroughly. During the storm it had rained plentifully. The ruts in the road were still damp and impressionable; and out of these ruts Uncle Billy gathered his reading. An automobile had stopped and backed and gone on again. Good many footprints, close together, and one long slip which trailed over the lip of the road. This had been made by Cranford, for he recognized the rubber spikes of the tennis-shoes. There had been a scrimmage. But who would want to fight Mr. Cranford was the question which troubled Uncle Billy. H'm. Here was a new rubber heel. And all these footprints vanished abruptly. Three persons; and they had all gone away in the automobile. Where? And why?

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Uncle Billy could tell you all about footprints; he could point out unhesitatingly the difference in detail between those of a rabbit, a dog, a cat and a woodchuck; but logical deduction was something which swam in ether many miles above his hoary head. Doggedly, however, he followed the tire tracks till they entered the village and at length turned off toward Watertown. He could not follow on foot to Watertown; out of the question; his legs were no match for gasoline. Shaking his head, he plodded back to the boat-house. Mr. Cranford had been abducted. Most amazing! How should he tell Miss Wynne? Hadn't he best say nothing till she was up and about? She'd worry.

He was all broken up. He loved the boy; and for all that he called him Mr. Cranford, he would never be any older than fifteen. First impressions are strongest. Abducted, and not a soul knew what for! Maybe it was because Mr. Cranford was a millionaire, and they were

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going to hold him for ransom. But no; they never abducted grown-ups for that; only little children. Well, Mr. Cranford was an educated man; if he was in serious difficulties, he had the brains to extricate himself. The one possible thing he, Uncle Billy, could do with profit would be to loiter about the hotel and watch for a man with new rubber heels.

The situation was not without its humorous angle, though it was unappreciated by the guide. At six o'clock that evening he had come to the conclusion that as a detective he was a blooming fizzle. He had, during the afternoon, detected new rubber heels on the shoes of seven men: a guest at the hotel, the local druggist, a man who had a summer cottage in the village, the tin-smith, the hotel proprietor and the bartender. The guest, the man who had the cottage and the tin-smith, all had automobiles with the same make of tires. Nobody but the Archangel Michael could make head or tail to such a muddle. Uncle Billy did not sleep well that night.

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Neither did the object of all these earnest endeavors; nor at any time the following day.

Cranford's bedroom was a circular affair, windowless, whose sole entrance and exit was a trap-door some five feet beyond the reach of his fingers. Briefly, an empty cistern in a deserted farmhouse, four or five miles inland. It was as stuffy as the hold of a Red Sea tramp. Whenever he wanted a drink of water he had to grope for the pail; he could not go to it directly. Within square walls one retains the sense of angles, even in the dark; but the topography of a circular wooden cistern needed something far beyond elemental mathematics. The needle of that mental compass which directs us to things in the dark swung at a tangent in Cranford's case.

For nearly forty-eight hours, two days, he had been incarcerated in this unusual prison. From the fight in the road, down to this very hour, not a question had been asked. He had not even seen his captors since night before last.

The candle they had left him had gone out in

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a sputter and welter of wax the night before. All these weary hours in blackness in such a breathless hole, did not make up an agreeable experience. Every time he stirred about, the dry silt on the cistern's bottom drifted up chokingly. Ages ago the rain-pipes had been disconnected, so he was in no danger of being deluged with muddy water. Reprisals. Very well; they should find eventually that two could play at that game. That they meant him bodily harm he did not for a moment believe.

Several times during the day he had heard automobiles passing, sometimes going north, sometimes going south; but none of them ever stopped.

Three matches left. He fumbled them undecidedly. He was terribly anxious to look at his watch, however little the knowledge of time would serve him. The water in the pail was getting low and the bread was gone. Surely they would return to renew his meager larder. At length he could resist the temptation no

## A NOVEL PRISON

longer. He struck a match and found that it was almost nine. Ere the glow of the match died, he heard the putter of an automobile. It paused. His heart beat quickly. He tried to count the minutes between the death of that noise and the birth of another. Came the muffled closing of a door. They had come at last.

This affair was Diana's; and never should these rascals learn anything from him. He knew nothing; he would not have to lie or dodge or evade. He would tell them frankly that they were wasting their time, and let it go at that. He felt secure in this respect: he would be missed and searched for and eventually found.

The trap-door opened and a ladder came slithering down.

"Come up," said a voice.

Cranford climbed out of the cistern and stood blinking in the light of a detached automobile lamp. For a while he remained at the edge of

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the cistern, waiting till his dark-smothered eyes resumed their functions. Then he saw Hanchett and Dennison, and in the gloom of a corner a third man. Without thinking of the tinge of melodrama in the act, Cranford filled his pipe and began smoking. He had not dared to smoke in the cistern; he would have suffocated. Ah! but the smoke tasted good.

"Well, gentlemen?" he said quietly.

Hanchett smiled. Dusty, cobwebbed, disheveled, his face daubed like a street-urchin's, Cranford presented really a comic picture; and the sang-froid with which he lighted his pipe made him irresistible to Hanchett's ever-ready appreciation of the ludicrous.

"Cranford, we shan't waste time beating about the bush. It doesn't matter how or when you learned. We want what you took from Pidgin Island."

"What was it I took?"

Hanchett smiled again. "You can't pass your hand up like that. Cranford, we do not



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wish you injury or inconvenience. Clever idea of yours to have that telegram delayed. We found it out, however."

Cranford held his surprise in check. What a woman! Not a detail had escaped her. "I dare say by this time you've been through my belongings at the hotel."

"We have,"—frankly.

"And found nothing."

"And found nothing; else, your guide would be releasing you."

"Do you want the truth?"

"As quickly as you can give it."

The prisoner smoked for a minute or two. "Well, then, you've had all your trouble over nothing. I haven't the slightest idea what is going on, what it is you're trying to smuggle across. To this is added the fact that I should not tell you if I did. I realize, in the parlance of your particular world, you are out to do me for the crutches. Capital guesswork, wasn't it?"

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A rumble from the corner.

“ Ah! Mr. Smead? ”

Smead rose and limped into the light.  
“ Cranford, give them up. Otherwise, on my word, you'll stay here till the crack of doom.”

“ Or Gabriel's trump,” supplemented Mr. Dennison.

Cranford puffed and let the smoke drift up into his nostrils.

“ We haven't got all night.”

“ You've got just as much time as I have. All of you are smokers; you should be without tobacco as long as I have, and you'd appreciate how good it is. Well, if I had what you think I have, I'd keep it. That's flat. That ought to be definite enough to convince you that you are wasting your time and mine.”

“ Give him his bread and fill up the pail,” said Smead. “ Another twenty-four hours will bring him to reason.”

“ Would you object if I washed my face and hands first? Water is necessary inside, of



ARTHUR WILLIAM BROWN

"Cranford give them up"



## A NOVEL PRISON

course; but I'd feel a trifle more comfortable with a few handfuls on the outside."

"Get your pail," said Hanchett.

Cranford went down the ladder and fetched the pail.

"Dennison, I appoint you Ganymede," declared Hanchett loftily.

"What's the matter with Fagin?"

"Well, then, Fagin, off with you to the well."

Fagin. Cranford had never heard that name associated with smuggling. He knew of a Fagin who was an inveterate gambler and book-maker at the race-tracks, not of the highest reputation.

The well was in the rear of the house. Fagin returned presently and set down the pail before Cranford, who took off his coat, performed most grateful ablutions, and coolly wiped his face and hands on the lining of his coat.

"Thanks."

"That's right; coddle him," sneered Smead.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

"I understand your point of view," replied Cranford. "You do not understand what the word of a gentleman means. I know absolutely nothing. Since I do not believe you intend to put me out of the way, you three shall answer for this. I do not forget."

"Neither do we, Mr. Cranford," said Hanchett, stepping close. "We can outwait you in this game. You shall stay here on bread and water till the snows come. That's final. I like your pluck, but it will not serve you here. Come; where did you put them? I am willing to give you your usual moiety."

Cranford checked his wrath. Never had he hated any one so completely as this cool handsome rogue. He puffed his pipe three or four times, knocked the bowl against his heel, and turned toward the ladder.

"No candles this time; twenty-four hours in the dark."

"So long as you're not bent on starving me, a day or two more in this hole will not matter."

## A NOVEL PRISON

Cranford began the descent. His head was just above the level of the floor, when he heard Hanchett laugh. He paused.

“Cranford, I’m beginning to like you. I’ll make it two candles and a box of matches.”

“Fool!” growled Smead.

“You be still,” retorted the son. “He’s right; you don’t appreciate him. I like a cool hand, no matter which side he is on. A brave man isn’t so common that we can afford to ignore him when we meet him. He’ll have his candles and matches; and to-morrow night he may be a little tamer, and tell us *who* has them.”

“What do you mean by that?” demanded Smead.

“Why, he really hasn’t got them, but knows who has. You’re as dense as a sand-bank. Found them, but gave them to some one else to keep. Clever!”

For a brief space Cranford turned his head and stared at the young man; then went on down the ladder.

## CHAPTER XVI

### WHO DIANA WAS

**O**N the farmhouse veranda, sometimes called the front porch, the stoop, and often the piazza, Diana sat in her steamer-chair. Her arm was still in a sling and over her injured foot, a furry carriage-boot.

The great broad silvery river flowed serenely past: the calm and imperturbable freighters swam in and out, lakeward or seaward, laden with grain and coal and lumber. And cocky truculent motor-boats scurried hither and thither with that absurd importance always assumed defensively by small things. What aloof and haughty objects steamships are, as they glide by, just far enough away to hang between reality and enchantment: like a woman on her way to church Easter morning, supremely confident in her milliner and modiste,



## WHO DIANA WAS

her poudre and capillary mise en scène; never a coquetting glance over her shoulder; onward, majestically.

Diana faced the road toward the village. Whenever she saw the figure of a man in the distance she would lean forward from her pillows, only to recline again, embittered that she could not resist the impulse. Why should she wait and watch? He was busy; perhaps he had gone away. Had it not been her wish that he should go and no more waste his time in thought of her? The gender feminine: to wish one thing and desire another.

"It's no use, Frances. I am not listening to a word you're reading."

"I have not been reading for the last ten minutes, Diana," replied she of the tragic eyes and the intaglio face. She too had been watching the road.

"Let us talk."

"Very well; let us talk."

An interval of silence.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

“In mercy’s name, why don’t you begin?” asked Diana impatiently.

“I was waiting for you. The water is very beautiful, isn’t it?”

Diana laughed. “Frances, you and I are two fizzles.”

Frances laid the book on a chair. “I feel beaten, Di. I’ve been wondering what I shall do after this. I shall have to work; and I am useless, utterly useless.”

“And do I not feel beaten also?”—bitterly. “Only . . .”

“Yes; only you can fight while I have no ability except for waiting and watching.”

“Fight? Ah, yes! I can do that. You are weak, Frances. Why don’t you crush it out of your heart?”

“Can you?”

“Crush what?”

“You are waiting and watching for some one. You never look toward the lake, always toward the village.”

## WHO DIANA WAS

The fingers of Diana's free hand drummed tattoo. The other stooped over suddenly and stopped the agitation with her lips.

"You have been so good to me! I have been very unhappy. One by one I let them go. I hated to part with a single one of them; but needs said must. They were so beautiful. But I had starved else."

"Foolish Frances! Well, yes; we are both of us unhappy; only, you accept your fate resignedly, and I rebel against mine, always and eternally. I rebel against the accident which makes me what I am; which stands as a wall between me and what might be. I rebel against the lack of money, my love of fine clothes and comforts. Extravagance is the heritage of all women; but I am one of those who war against the desire. I have saved half of all I have earned."

"You have only to ask, and all these things are yours."

"What?"—wrathfully. "On my knees, I?"

## PIDGIN ISLAND

I rather believe not. Humble my pride in the dust, for nothing, perhaps? No. I can earn my living. It isn't foolish pride; it's the pride which comes of unjust hurt. And I have been hurt, terribly hurt, through no fault of mine."

"And so have I."

"Ah, you thrust yourself into that hurt; you were warned. Mine was given me gratuitously."

Frances reached for the book. "Perhaps I had better read again."

"Am I showing an irritability of temper?" —contritely.

"No, Di; it is because you are always so cruelly right in what you say."

"Wait." Diana saw some one coming along the road, afoot. "It's Uncle Billy. I wonder where he's been keeping himself? His chatter will be as tonic for us both. He's a dear old man. Imagine a guide with a box of cold-cream in his pocket for sunburn!"

"Hello, Miss Wynne!" hailed Uncle Billy,

## WHO DIANA WAS

as he came up the path. "How y' gittin' along?"

"Walked across the room this morning."

"Fine!"

"But where have you been keeping yourself?"

"Awful busy." Uncle Billy sat down on the steps and ran his stubby finger round the inside of his celluloid collar, a concession to this hour. "Had t' take th' engine all apart. I never see such a engine 'n all my life. Reg'lar mule of a thing."

"Too busy to come out and ask how I was getting along?"—reproachfully.

"Here, ain't I?"—uneasily.

"Uncle Billy, you're a mighty poor fib-teller. What has happened?"

He knew that he was in a net, and the longer he hedged the tighter the net would draw.

"I ain't bringin' good news."

"Is Mr. Cranford ill?"

Frances smiled discreetly.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

“Not that I know of. I was goin’ t’ tell y’ th’ day it happened. But I wa’n’t sure I hadn’t found a mare’s-nest. Well, Mr. Cranford’s been kidnaped.”

“Kidnaped!”—from both women.

Uncle Billy looked doubtfully at the strange young lady. “Mebbe I better see y’ alone.”

“She understands. Tell me instantly what has happened.” There was no weariness in Diana’s face now.

Uncle Billy recounted his experiences. What he lacked in elegant phraseology he made up in simple directness. The sum of it was, Mr. Cranford was gone, carried off in an automobile, no one knew where.

“Frances, do you know what this means?” said Diana excitedly.

“Why, Mr. Cranford is in trouble.”

“Girl alive, it means that they haven’t got them! And they believe he knows; and they’ve carried him off to force the truth from him. Oh! we’ll beat them yet.”

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"But where are they?"

"I shall find that out as soon as I can walk."

So that was it? Uncle Billy nodded. "How we goin' t' git Mr. Cranford out?"—which was far more important to him than any treasure he could call to mind.

"Why didn't you let me know at once?—the morning after? All this time wasted! Oh, if I could only walk! But I must sit here helpless. Go back to the hotel immediately and ask for Mr. Hanchett, and be sure that you see him. Under no circumstances let him know that you are aware of anything wrong."

"Th' hull village is talkin'."

"Never mind that. Say to him that Miss Wynne wishes to see him here after dinner."

"Rubber heels!"

"What's that?"

"One o' th' chaps wore new rubber heels. It's him. All right. I'm t' tell him t' come out after supper."

"That and nothing more."

## PIDGIN ISLAND

"They's a detective from Watertown . . ."

"Never mind the detective. Don't have anything to do with him. I'm something of a detective myself, Uncle Billy."

"You, Miss Wynne? By jings!"

"I have hinted that I was trying to prevent a crime. It can not matter now if I tell you a few facts. But you must promise to keep these to yourself. I am a secret agent of the United States Customs. Now, go quickly. And to-morrow I'll tell you all there is to it; and you shall have your hundred dollars, gladly. Time is most important now. Mr. Cranford must be liberated. Come to-morrow afternoon about this time. Please go at once."

"All right, Miss Wynne; to-morrow."

To-morrow that really was to be; not to-morrow's to-morrow, the elusive, the so-near and yet the ever-far.

It was a mile and a half to the hotel, but Uncle Billy made it inside of twenty minutes. He was told at the hotel that Mr. Hanchett



## WHO DIANA WAS

and his friend were across the river, fishing in the bay. So Uncle Billy sat down on the dock and waited. Fishing. Some nerve, after desperately abducting a man and hiding him somewhere. Smugglers. Would he ever find out what they were smuggling? Why didn't she tell the regular inspector of the port, across the street from the hotel? New rubber heels. Never would have suspected him in a thousand years. Nice-mannered and nice-looking, and young. And yet he had kidnaped Mr. Cranford. The old guide's blood began to boil truculently. The nerve of it, right here in this peaceful village! And when, finally, his patience was rewarded, he strenuously resisted the desire to fling himself upon the jesting laughing fisherman as he climbed out of the boat. Uncle Billy grudgingly admitted that the catch was a good one.

"Nice catch, eh?" said the young man, as he stepped toward Uncle Billy who stood in the middle of the walk leading to the hotel.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

“Not s’ bad.”

“There you are! You guides will never come out squarely in the open and say that the other fellow’s got a good catch. It’s rank jealousy.”

“Mr. Hanchett, Miss Diana Wynne wants t’ see y’ out at th’ farm right after supper.”

“And who is Miss Diana Wynne?”—carelessly.

“Better go ’n’ find out;” and with this advice the guide turned and made off.

Mr. Hanchett eyed the retreating figure frowningly.

“Fagin, you two will have to go out there. I’ve got something equally important on hand.”

“All right, Denny. We’ll feed him and wash his face and hands for him. That cistern was a stroke of luck. Without it, some one of us would have had to stay there all the time. He couldn’t get out with a burglar’s kit.”

“Perhaps.” Diana. What did she want? What did she know? Had Cranford made a confidante of her? Later, he told Smead.

## WHO DIANA WAS

"Go and find out. Find out what she is doing up here. If you don't get anywhere, I'll go out myself to-morrow."

"I shan't get anywhere. You may take my word for that. She's a queer bundle. I'm all at sea over this fluke. Cranford, I swear, hasn't got them."

"Then he left them with her. I'm beginning to get sick of the whole deal. Why couldn't you have taken them into New York, or Boston, or Philadelphia? In this hole!"

"I was watched day and night, save when I could slip away. That's why I brought nothing over; chose this place; built up my game like a chess-player. Not a flaw anywhere; and now this fluke. A fine joke, if she has them. But I don't see how. Who'd think . . . Well, Cranford must be liberated as soon as we can safely go about it. His guide acts as if he suspected something, and that fool of a detective has been watching me."

"I propose to teach Cranford a lesson. He'll find I'm not the sort of a man to play against."

## PIDGIN ISLAND

“Piffle! Can’t you see that he’s far more dangerous than you are? Did you note the cool way he went down the ladder? Ah! some new arrivals,”—with a nod toward the entrance.

Two old men came in. One of them must have been very handsome in his youth; there was still some evidence of this fact in the nose, the eyes, the mouth, and the shape of the head, which he carried erect. His hair was snow-white. Smead hastily turned his back and went into the barroom. The son stared astonishingly at the teetering door. Now what? Some one his father did not care to meet? There were many.

Michael Smead’s retreat, however, did not serve. An hour later he met the white-haired gentleman as the latter was issuing from the dining-room. He paused, adjusted his eyeglasses and looked Smead up and down, from his shoes to his head, with insolent amusement. Smead, his face as red as the western sky,

## WHO DIANA WAS

passed on into the dining-room, fury and death in his heart. For this was the one man on earth who had dared to tell him, Michael Smead, truths, pointblank, in diction as elegant as the voice was hard and cold. Nearly thirty years ago.

"Simmons," he heard the old man say to his companion, "Simmons, I haven't played a game of billiards in years. Suppose we try a hand?"

Smead ate his dinner without relish. He was so confused that he did not question the old man's presence here, or inquire into what his errand might be. He could only think that he had permitted him to stare him out of countenance. Then, too, the sight of that picturesque face brought back many unpleasant recollections, incidents which he believed forgotten. But the door of memory is a trembling one.

"Know that man?" asked the son curiously.

"None of your business."

## PIDGIN ISLAND

“Ah, I see!”—banteringly. “He knows *you*.”

Smead left the table without his usual cup of coffee. He felt harassed, like a rat driven into a corner. Why had he stopped like a yokel and given the old man the opportunity? All right! he thought grimly; let him smile. That smile would never balance the hurt he, Smead, had given.

“Fagin, watch him carefully to-night. He may take it into his head to rough it.”

“Why not? Getting tender, Donny?”

“No, Fagin; but I’m rather sick of the whole business. Things have turned up unexpectedly. Sick at heart, if you want to know the truth. Over the past, over the future. I’d like to have a whack at living straight, doing honest work, if they’d let me. South America or South Africa, where they don’t know me. Fagin, I’m Smead’s son.”

Fagin had ordered coffee, but he forgot to drink it.

## WHO DIANA WAS

An accomplished rogue who did not want to be a rogue any longer. A year ago, nothing had worried him; money had come easily; at war with society, but at peace with himself. And now, this unaccountable upheaval in his soul. Had the sight of Diana set it in motion? Diana, straight and honest as light, "brave as the morning"! Might it not be the constant thought of some one else whom he had wronged, carelessly? A blind cowardly rage had drawn him into this coil. Could he walk straight, with all these ghosts trooping beside him? Like father, like son; was that to be till the end of the chapter? To break her spirit, to humble her pride . . . as if a woman like she was would ever surrender to coercion! . . . He found himself at the farmhouse door. He knocked.

"Miss Wynne?" he inquired.

"She is waiting in the parlor, sir. This way."

He entered the room, knowing that he was

## PIDGIN ISLAND

beaten. Diana would never have sent for him unless sure that she was mistress of the situation. She was in her steamer-chair. She was as beautiful as Palma Vecchio's Santa Barbara. With all his petty villainies, his make-shifts, his follies, one thing always burned clearly and purely in his heart; his love for this young woman who was gazing at him with critical unfriendly eyes.

"You sent for me, Di?"

"Yes,"—crisply. "I want Mr. Cranford liberated at once. I am the person who is responsible for your present embarrassment."

"You, Di?" He was genuinely astonished.

"Myself. For a long time I have been in the secret service. I usually pose as a stewardess on the North Atlantic liners. I was sent for by one whom we both know and told what had taken place. I gave my word that you should not succeed. A sneak's business, I believe you call it,"—with an ironical smile. "Your exploits have been of the daredevil



## WHO DIANA WAS

kind, all save this last one. You had courage; it was great sport; I really believe you never stopped to look deeply into the things you have done. But this was base and low and despicable."

"So it was, Di,"—calmly. "But quite like me."

She started and shot him a puzzled glance. She was not sure. He was a matchless banterer.

"Nature," he went on, "is the greatest usurer of them all. Think of what she charges on the loan of a small folly! And I am terribly in debt to her. Don't look puzzled, Di; it isn't banter. You have beaten me. Doubtless you have them; and if that is the case, I'm rather glad of it. Give them back to her. Tell her the rogue is sorry, sorry that he ever crossed her path, from the very bottom of his soul, and that he has begun to believe that he has one."

Her eyes grew wider and wider.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

"I'll go out and release Cranford. He fooled us neatly. Never dreamed that you were in this. You're a wonderful young woman. To-morrow . . . South America Di, I've been Smead's son, Michael Smead's. A rare handicap. I'm not whining. What's done can't be undone; and most of it was badly done."

"If I could only believe you!"—breathlessly.

"There you are. A liar and a rogue; who'd believe him? Wolf! Wolf! Too many times I've cried it. Now, no one hears."

"Frances!" Diana called. "Frances!"

The young man lay back against the wall, his hands clutching at it, stunned and speechless.

The door at the far side of the fireplace opened, and she who was called Frances entered quietly. She was white, but not more so than the man who stared at her. A tableau, in which each poser heard nothing but the

## WHO DIANA WAS

thunder of the heart. A freighter, coming in from the lake, boomed its warning. The tenseness went out of the three, and the young man was first to find his speech.

“Di, I marvel at your completeness. Can you forgive me? If you could only have seen into my mind! I never dreamed—I was selfish and thoughtless—what that house might mean to you. It was where I had always lived. Can’t you see? I was like a jar in a potter’s oven—mud-buried.”

“Don, you were the first human being I ever loved. I made you out a fairy prince, all my own. And you lied to me; everybody lied to me; but your lies cut deepest and will be last to heal. I forgive you. And if you mean what you say, I will do more than forgive, I will help.”

A deep breath, and then he spoke to the other woman. “And can you forgive, too, Frances? Can you forgive the rogue who tried to break your heart?—the rogue who

## PIDGIN ISLAND

will this night pass out of your life forever? Di, the other night I said that you were one of the two things I loved. Frances is the other. A fine joke, isn't it? To find out, too late. Can't you hear the gods laughing somewhere? . . . Frances, it is true. And the knowledge of it is the thing which has started to work havoc or redemption, as you will. I'm going to live straight, and if I win out, shall I come back? Yes, no? So be it. But at least I want to go away with the thought that you have forgiven me."

The woman's heart in her flew to him, but her feet were lead. With her eyes she hated and despised him, but her ears were traitors. The sound of that musical voice was more potent than reason, more subtle than drug. She had thrown away everything because of it.

"Why did you take them?" She heard her voice with the wonder of one detached.

"I wanted to humble your pride; I wanted you where I could have some power over



ARTHUR WILLIAM BROWN.

"Who is this man?"



## WHO DIANA WAS

you; if you were penniless, there would be hope for me. You'd have to come. Blind fool, wasn't I?"

The sound of stumbling feet, the banging of the screen-door outside: and Cranford, haggard and begrimed, staggered into the parlor. Immediately he flung himself upon the younger Smead, who was too surprised to offer resistance. Pinning him against the wall with the last bit of strength he possessed, Cranford looked over his shoulder at Diana.

"Who is this man?" he cried hoarsely. "Is he your husband?"

With her eyes closed and her heart beating wildly, Diana answered slowly: "He is Donald Smead, my brother. I am the daughter of Michael Smead."

## CHAPTER XVII

### ROMANCE

**C**RANFORD released his enemy, stared at him, at Diana, at the other young woman he had never seen before. . . . Her brother! He laughed, toppled into a chair, and bent his aching head to his knees. He was hanging on to things by a mere rag of nervous energy. . . . The daughter of Michael Smead!

That morning, by the aid of what remained of his last candle, he had discovered a loose plank in the side of the cistern; and all day long, with but few intervals of rest, he had tugged and twisted and pulled and kicked. The plank gave outward at five o'clock or thereabouts. But two more were necessary to admit of his passing out into the cellar and thence to freedom. Back of his energy was the abiding fear that they might return be-



## ROMANCE

fore his work was done. Oak planks, banded together with hoops of steel; sound wood and tough metal; a herculean task for a man weak from lack of proper nourishment; for bread and water do not make strength. Followed a stumbling staggering journey in the dark, ignorant of how far he was away, persistently onward toward the west, still crimson and purple. In all, he had come six miles . . . to find that this man was her brother and that she was the daughter of Michael Smead!

“Di, I’ll be getting on my way.” The younger Smead straightened his collar and tie mechanically. With Cranford at liberty, he sensed the danger in which his father and companion stood. He must at least give them fair warning.

“Do you mean it all, Don?”

“About going away, of trying hereafter to walk straight? From the bottom of my soul, girl. It doesn’t pay. South America. Will you wish me good luck?”

## PIDGIN ISLAND

“Yes, yes; good luck. I shall always be thinking of you.” She stretched out her hand. He clasped it, stooped and lightly kissed her hair. She would not have stayed him for the world. Battle lay before him, the bitterest of all warfares: the conquest of indulgence, of inclination and what was partly bred in the bone. Sentiment would but serve to weaken him; so he must have none of it. He must go away with the belief that what he had lost would be hard to regain. She was a little afraid of Frances: what would she do?

Donald would always be to her The Faun, handsome, charming, whimsical, merry. Diana had never seen her father till the day of her arrival in New York; but Donald had visited her at the convent many times.

The young man offered his hand to the other woman, while Diana gazed, dim-eyed, at the huddled man in the chair.

“Not yet!” said Frances, shrinking back.

Donald shrugged and smiled. “I do not

## ROMANCE

blame you, Frances. But will you wish me well?"

"God speed you and God guard you . . . Donald.

"Thanks."

"Oh, I can't touch your hand just now! There are so many black things between it and mine."

"True enough. But if I win out . . .?"

"How shall we know?"—wearily.

"When I come back it will be written on my face and in my eyes." He picked up his hat, looked down at Cranford, smiled oddly, passed from the room and gently shut the door.

No sooner was he gone than the woman who had denied his hand flew wildly to the door . . . and stopped before her hand touched the knob.

"No, no, Frances!" cried Diana.

The man on the veranda instinctively paused.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

“But I can not let him carry away that lie! I might never see him again.”

“Do not call him back. He must have something to fight for, to win back. He knows. He has the keenest eye and the quickest mind of any man I know.”

Frances turned and ran swiftly back to her room, closing the door violently.

Outside the young man went down the steps. He smiled up at the stars. To lay his ghosts, one by one, and then to return. All right; so be it. Resolutely he set his foot toward the road: rocky and ragged and long and straight. Three years ago, as I write. And two women wait patiently, with that assurance, that faith unquenchable, which fills the feminine heart when it loves. I know nothing more of him. That door is still open, that chapter still unfinished.

So. Diana looked sadly at the bowed man in the chair. The knowledge that she was the daughter of the notorious Smead had crushed

## ROMANCE

him. Pleasant dream, good-by! She longed to ease the hurt, to touch his hair: women have a fancy for that; there is always more of the mother in them than the lover.

“Mr. Cranford, are you ill?”

Throughout this demi-tragedy, Cranford had remained motionless, unable to sense the words which entered his ears. His body was numb. He wanted to lie down and go to sleep.

“Mr. Cranford!”

This time he raised his head.

“Are you ill?”

“I don’t know. I’m afraid to move; I shall fall down. Nothing but bread and water; mighty weak.”

Diana touched the bell. “Some cold chicken and a glass of milk. Have you any port wine in the house?”

“Yes, Miss Wynne.”

“Martha, bring me the wine first. That’ll set me up till I can get back to the hotel.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

Will you have them hitch up the team? I feel pretty weak."

"Sure I will!"

He sipped the wine, and shortly the glow of it permeated his veins. He set the glass under the chair, and smiled. Diana was not expecting that smile; for it was warm and friendly and confident.

"You were to call me Cran," he said.

"Cran, I am sorry."

"Sorry for what? Who was that young woman?"

"My brother's wife."

"You are not married?"

"No."

"You told me you were."

"No, Cran; I told you that I could not marry any man . . . any man I might wish to marry. Can I?—Michael Smead's daughter?—a notorious gambler, a man without feeling or kindness or truth or honor?—my father?"

He got up and steadied himself by holding

## ROMANCE

on to the chair. "I did not stop at the hotel. I had to come straight to you. I must look pretty well banged up. . . . Will you marry me, Diana?"

"No,"—quietly. "Smead's daughter can not marry a man of your station."

"What kind of man do you think I am?"

"Very good-looking, when you are shaved and properly dressed."

"You can laugh?"

"Would it improve the situation if I wept?" If only he knew how desperately she was fighting! She wanted him, wanted his head on her breast, close to her heart, wanted to run her fingers through his tousled hair; wanted him. "Come; supposing I took you at your word and married you. Could you introduce me to your friends? I am proud."

"In heaven's name, why not?" His hand slipped from the chair and he crossed the room unsteadily. "Look at me, in the eyes, Diana, and tell me you will not marry me."

"I will not marry you, Cran." Her eyes

## PIDGIN ISLAND

looked up into his, bravely and unwaveringly.

"It is rather cruel of you. I'm helpless; I can not get up and leave you."

"Do you want to leave me?"

"Yes."

He groped mentally. Why was he so dull of wit? Suddenly he smiled again, and it sent a little shiver of terror into her heart. "I have it! Now, look up again and tell me you do not love me. If you can do that, why, I'll go away and bother you no more. No! Look at me, up here, and say it."

"I will not marry you."

"That isn't it. Say 'I do not love you' if you can."

"I can say it," she evaded; but her resolution was growing weaker as proportionately his grew stronger.

"Repeat after me—'I do not love you.'"

She was silent.

"What is your father to me?—friends? Out of the world somewhere you have come to



## ROMANCE

me, and I shall not let you go. Will you wreck your life and mine over such a silly phantom? Wasn't my grandfather a rascal, a precious rascal? Diana, you can't say it!" He fell on his knees, clumsily, at the side of her chair. "You can't look into my eyes and tell me you do not love me. Sweetheart . . ."

"Please go!" she begged.

"I'd be a fine lover, wouldn't I! I shall stay here till the sun rises, unless you tell me one way or the other."

Lover! The kind a woman dreams of, waits for. The prince she had so many times seen outside the convent gates. What mattered the grime on his face, the three days' growth of beard, the matted hair? To her he had come first. Lover! A smile quivered on her lips, and he saw it. He seized her hand, turned its palm upward and pressed it against his face. After a moment he looked up.

"You can't say it?"

"No."

## PIDGIN ISLAND

"You don't want me to go?"

"No."

"You do love me?"

"With all my weak foolish heart! If only  
. . ."

"Never mind anything else; you mustn't  
spoil it. Will you marry me?"

"I ought not to, but I will . . . whenever  
you wish." And to make the surrender  
complete she drew his head tightly to her  
heart and laid her cheek upon it.

And why shouldn't the course of true love  
run smoothly once in a while? And they lived  
happy ever afterward—at least, three years I  
wot of.

Smead turned the note over and over in  
his hand. His cigar went from one corner of  
his mouth to the other. Occasionally a small  
wave slapped mischievously against the gun-  
wale and splashed his knees. Cranford out,  
the boy gone, and the old aristocrat metaphori-

## ROMANCE

cally stepping on his toes; not a very agreeable morning. So many years had gone on like clockwork that he had begun to take it for granted that this would always continue. Now, everybody seemed bent on crossing him. South America. His teeth sank into the tobacco. The young fool would be back quickly enough when his money gave out. Still, he ought not to have been so rough with him that day in Kingston. But the cool banter of the boy had maddened him. Down in the boy's heart lay some of his own unforgiving temperament. South America. Well, let him go there for a while; he'd turn up when the money gave out. The girl had been talking twaddle to him, stirring him up, as like as not. Money; yellow-boys, fat rolls of them; the knock which opened every door. He'd come back for that; and when he did, he'd beg.

Suddenly his teeth met with a click, and the cigar bounded and rolled down his chest to the bottom of the boat. There are really two

## PIDGIN ISLAND

minds, active and subconscious; the latter often controls the physical movement without the other having anything to do with it. Smead bent and recovered his cigar. Played! He knew now. The boy had them; possession had given him this courage; a quarter of a million; and South America, where no one would ask questions. Played! Diana should tell him where the boy had gone; and if it was the last thing he ever did, he would find him. Played all along, made sport of!

At the farm he called for Miss Smead. There was nobody there by that name.

"Perhaps it is Miss Wynne you wish to see?"

Wynne. So she had taken her mother's name? The taste and sound of it, bitter indeed. It represented his one colossal mistake.

"I am her father. I wish to see her."

He was at once ushered into the parlor, and a single glance told him that he had chosen his time ill. Cranford, the smiling old aristocrat (though at this moment his face was grave

## ROMANCE

enough), the lawyer, and a young woman he did not know, standing behind Diana's chair.

Smead looked keenly at his daughter's face. She was as beautiful as ever her mother had been. The sight of her stirred nothing in his heart; no tender quickening, no regret. A normal man would have felt extremely uncomfortable in this room. Not Smead. He was afraid of nothing; his remarkable gambler's nerve had long since banished that sense of petty disturbance known as embarrassment.

"I wish to see you alone," he said directly.

"Whatever you may have to say to me must be said in the presence of my friends. I have no desire to be alone with you in the same room."

Straight from the shoulder. He nodded with appreciation. "I am your father."

"Beyond that accident of chance," she replied, "I do not recognize you."

The old aristocrat smiled amiably. Sweat came into the palms of the man by the door.

"Where's Donald?" he asked.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

“He is, I hope, on his way to South America. If I knew exactly where, I should not tell you. What!—to have you drag him back to his evil ways?”

“You believe this twaddle?”

“I do.”

Smead laughed. “Well, you are wasting your time. He has lied to us all neatly. He went away with the gems stowed in his pocket. Fine reformation, that!”

“That is not true.”

“And who might you be?” inquired Smead coldly.

“I am Donald’s wife,” answered Frances.

He appraised her critically. “The boy always had luck and taste.”

Frances felt the truth and the sting of this thrust, but she did not lower her eyes.

“Did you ever hear of the emeralds of the Princess Xenia, so-called?” added Smead. He could at least twist their hearts a bit, if nothing more.

## ROMANCE

"Yes. He left a note for me," interrupted Diana, "telling me what he did with them."

"Spiked!" murmured the old aristocrat, patting his hands together.

"And if he has the jewels, he has certain rights to them. They were mine." Frances met glance for glance.

"Yours? Stole them from you, his wife?"

"Perhaps he only took them," she modified.

"All women are fools."

"But all men are not rogues," said Cranford urbanely.

"Mr. Smead," said Diana, "I was born at sea, and my mother was buried at sea; and while she lay dying in the stateroom below, calling for you, calling for you, you told the steward not to bother you; you were busy playing cards in the smoke-room on deck. There is a burial at sea between you and me, Mr. Smead. These are the last words I shall ever speak to you."

Cranford stepped to the door and opened it.

## PIDGIN ISLAND

Right-about-face, with never a glance back, into the open, down the path to the dock, went Smead. In the parlor no one spoke till the putter of the motor died away in the distance.

"Simmons," said the very old man, "I hate that man greater than all the hatreds in my life combined; yet, what a son-in-law he would have made, born right!"

"I am tired, and my arm aches," said Diana.

"Grandchild, I am a very old, very lonely man. I have brought my pride to you and laid it at your feet. If your mother had come to me at any time, God is witness I would have taken her in my arms. But she was proud. Too proud to admit that her judgment was wrong and mine was right. I want young people in my house; laughter, music, coming and going. I want the ghosts driven out of its corners."

"Grandfather, I am going to marry the man I love. Whatever he says."

"Mr. Wynne," said Cranford, "I have but



## ROMANCE

little; yet, I believe that little will suffice. I could not live on my wife's bounty."

"Pride, eternal and everlasting!"

"A man without that kind of pride isn't worth the rope to hang him with."

"But she is bound to inherit what I have. Why waste all this time?"

"Let us compromise," interposed the suave Simmons. "Small birthday and Christmas gifts, and Thursdays and Sundays to dine at Mr. Wynne's."

Diana looked up at Cranford and he looked down at her. Then they both laughed; and the grandfather laughed, and Simmons cackled, and the young woman with the tragic eyes smiled.

"To that we readily agree," replied Cranford.

And then, Uncle Billy came rushing into the parlor, his battered haymaker on the back of his head, his face red, his eyes apop.

"Hey, Miss Wynne; I got 'em, I got 'em!"

## PIDGIN ISLAND

From under his arm he took the gray cotton casings and shook forth the butts of two Bristol rods. With trembling fingers he unscrewed the caps. A silvery cascade poured into Diana's lap; pearls, pearls, pearls!

"That was the wall I could not get over; I knew not how they were going to smuggle them in. Cran, these belonged to Frances' mother. Uncle Sam has had his tithes long ago. But if you had stumbled on them earlier, you would have had to report them, and they might have been confiscated."

"I understand."

"Diana," said the wife, "he meant it, he meant it!"

"Of course he did! Uncle Billy?"

"Huh?"

"Mr. Cranford and I are going to be married this afternoon."

"And Mr. Cranford," said the owner of that name, "desires the pleasure of your company as best man."

## ROMANCE

“By jings! Whut d’ y’ know ’bout that?  
An’ I’ll row y’ next season?”

“Always.”

Diana took Cranford’s hand and laid it against her cheek, and stared out of the window, through the late September haze, toward Pidgid Island.

“Lover!” she whispered.

THE END





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